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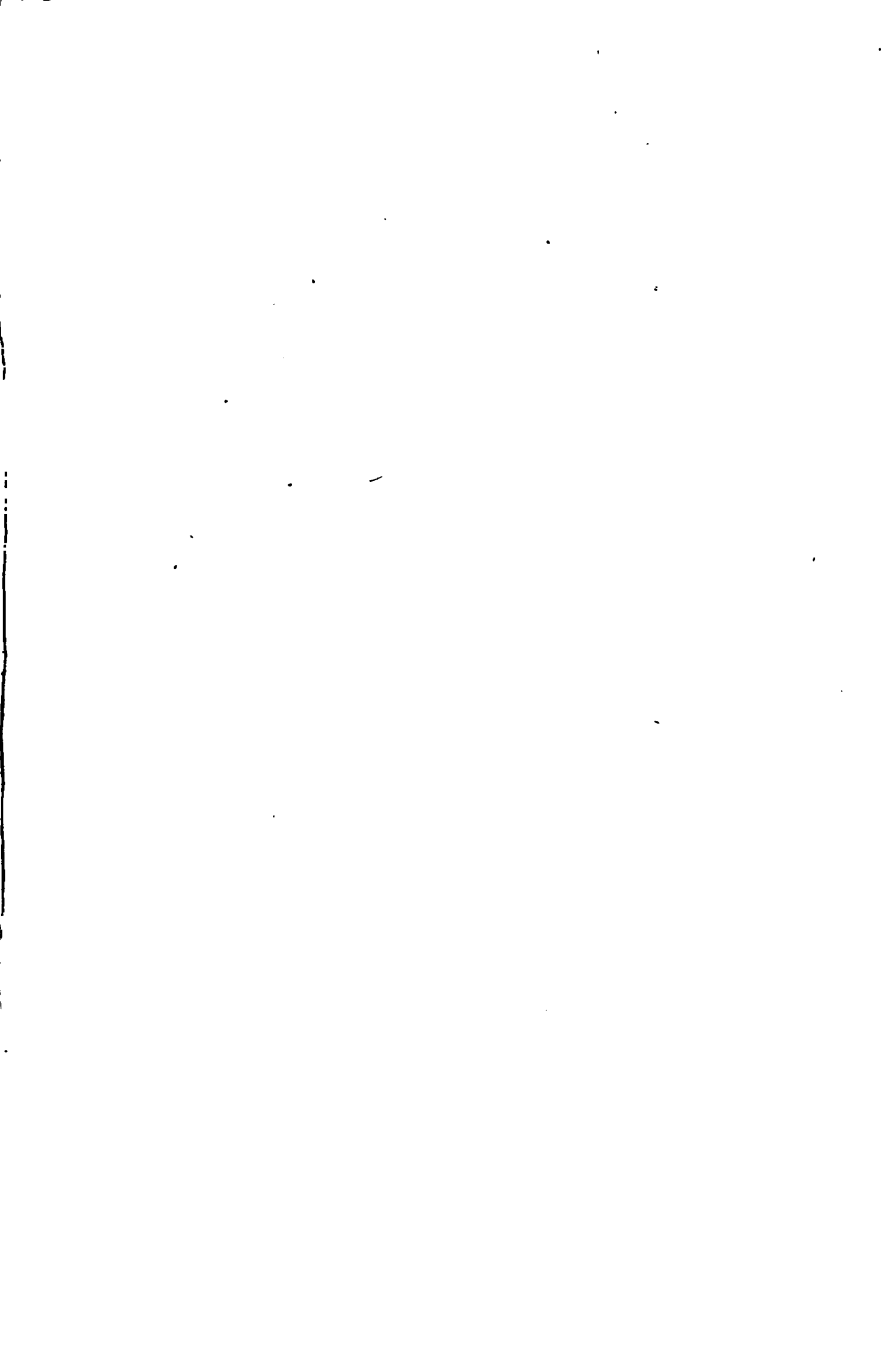
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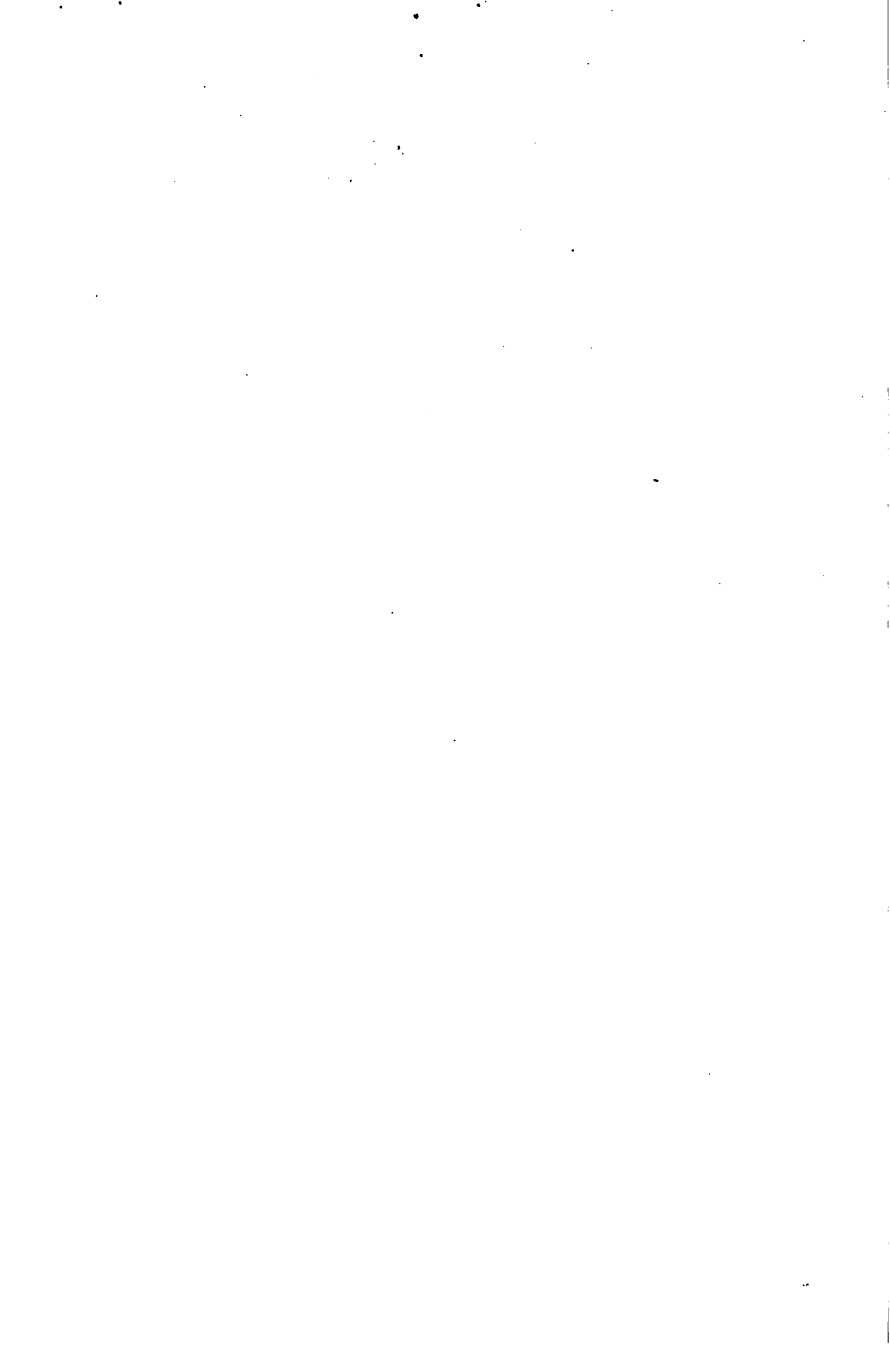




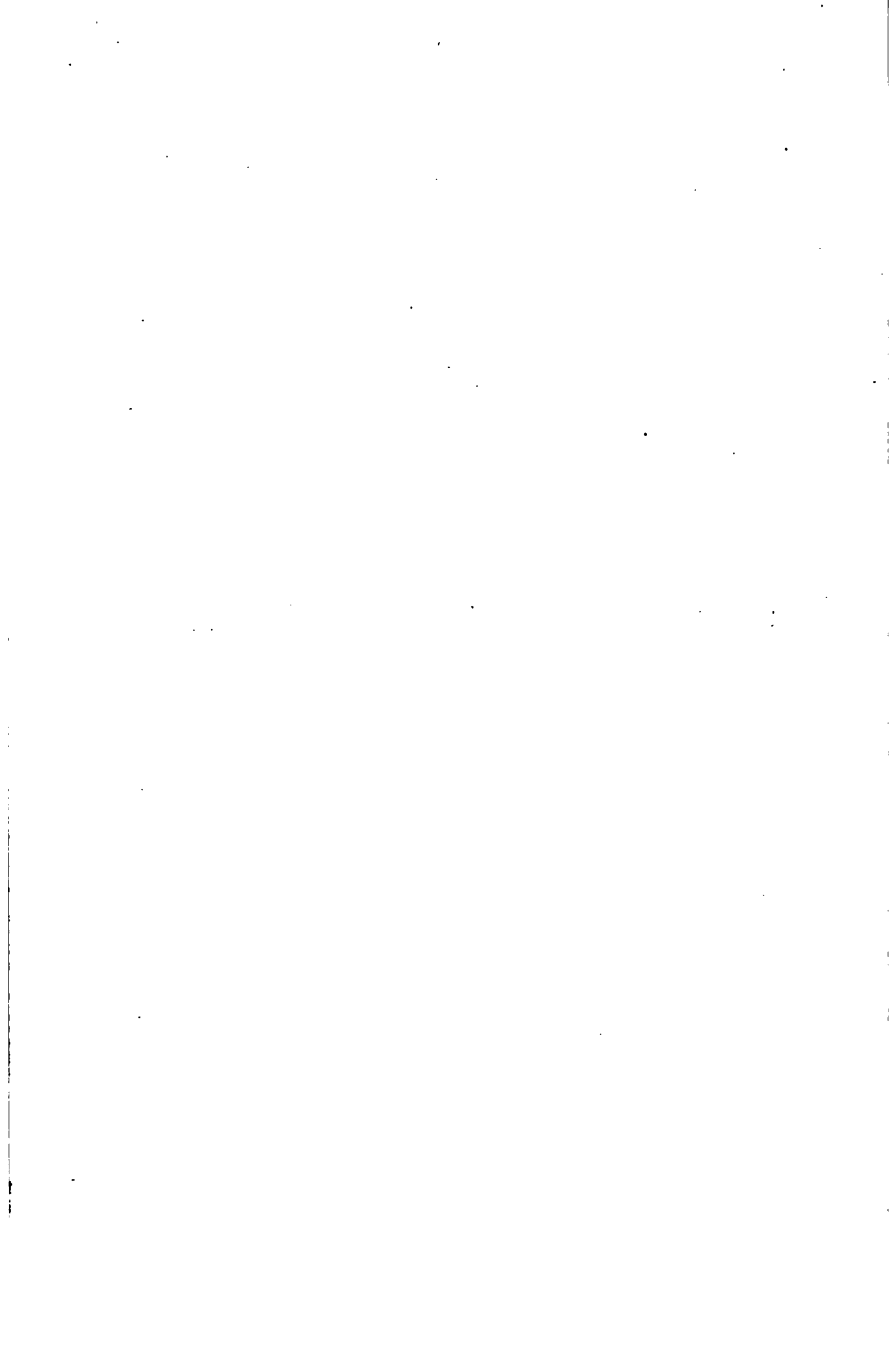
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**STORIES FOR EVERYBODY AND  
EVERYBODY'S CHILDREN**









DAME MARLOW ENQUIRES OF THE PIG FOR RUTH MUCKLEPAT

# HIGGLEDY-PIGGLEDY

OR

*STORIES FOR EVERYBODY AND  
EVERYBODY'S CHILDREN*

BY THE RIGHT HON.

E. H. KNATCHBULL-HUGESSEN, M.P.

AUTHOR OF 'WHISPERS FROM FAIRYLAND' 'QUEER FOLK'  
'STORIES FOR MY CHILDREN'  
ETC.



LONDON  
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1875

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25/. c. 28/.



*TO THE SILENT MEMBERS OF THE  
HOUSE OF COMMONS.*

GENTLEMEN,

THE great benefit which your unselfish abstinence from speech confers upon the nation, in allowing the business of its representative assembly to proceed, induces me to respectfully dedicate to you this little volume. There are two reasons for my doing so : one, that the title of the book admirably describes the usual condition of business in that assembly to which you and I are so proud to belong ; and another, in the fact that most of the Stories herein contained have been written within the precincts of the House of Commons itself, during hours when you and I have been awaiting the termination of speeches from certain of our eloquent brethren to whom we have deemed it unnecessary to listen, but whose voices stood between us and the close of the debate. At such times a man who has been busily occupied during the day cannot always find refuge in that refreshing slumber which is perhaps the most desirable state for mind and body. His brain still requires gentle action, and such I constantly find in betaking myself to the regions of Fairyland. Quietly seated in the gallery of ' the House,'

I forget for a time the cares and work of the day : the voice of the orator occasionally reaches me through an open door, the deep tones of 'Big Ben' ever and anon remind me of the passing hour, but I live with elves and fairies for the moment, and happily abandon myself to this 'unparliamentary,' but fascinating, society, until the sudden tinkle of the 'Division Bell' summons me back to the stern realities of Life. In the hope that my example may be followed by some of your number, and that you may thus find a new method of rendering pleasant those hours which I fear are occasionally tedious under our present system of unrestricted talk, I submit these Stories for your perusal, and subscribe myself,

Your obedient servant,

E. H. KNATCHBULL-HUGESSEN.

## PREFACE.



IT is a great thing to choose for a new book a title which all the world understands at once. Every reader, learned, or unlearned, will know the meaning of Higgledy-Piggledy.

It means——Higgledy-Piggledy. There is no other word in the English language which signifies exactly the same thing, and therefore there can be no difficulty about the matter. However, in case there should be anyone who requires further explanation, I am informed by a committee of under-housemaids who have lately been considering the subject, that the words Higgledy-Piggledy convey the idea of ‘things jumbled up together anyhow’—things, in short, in a state of confusion. What, then, can be a more appropriate title for a book such as that which I

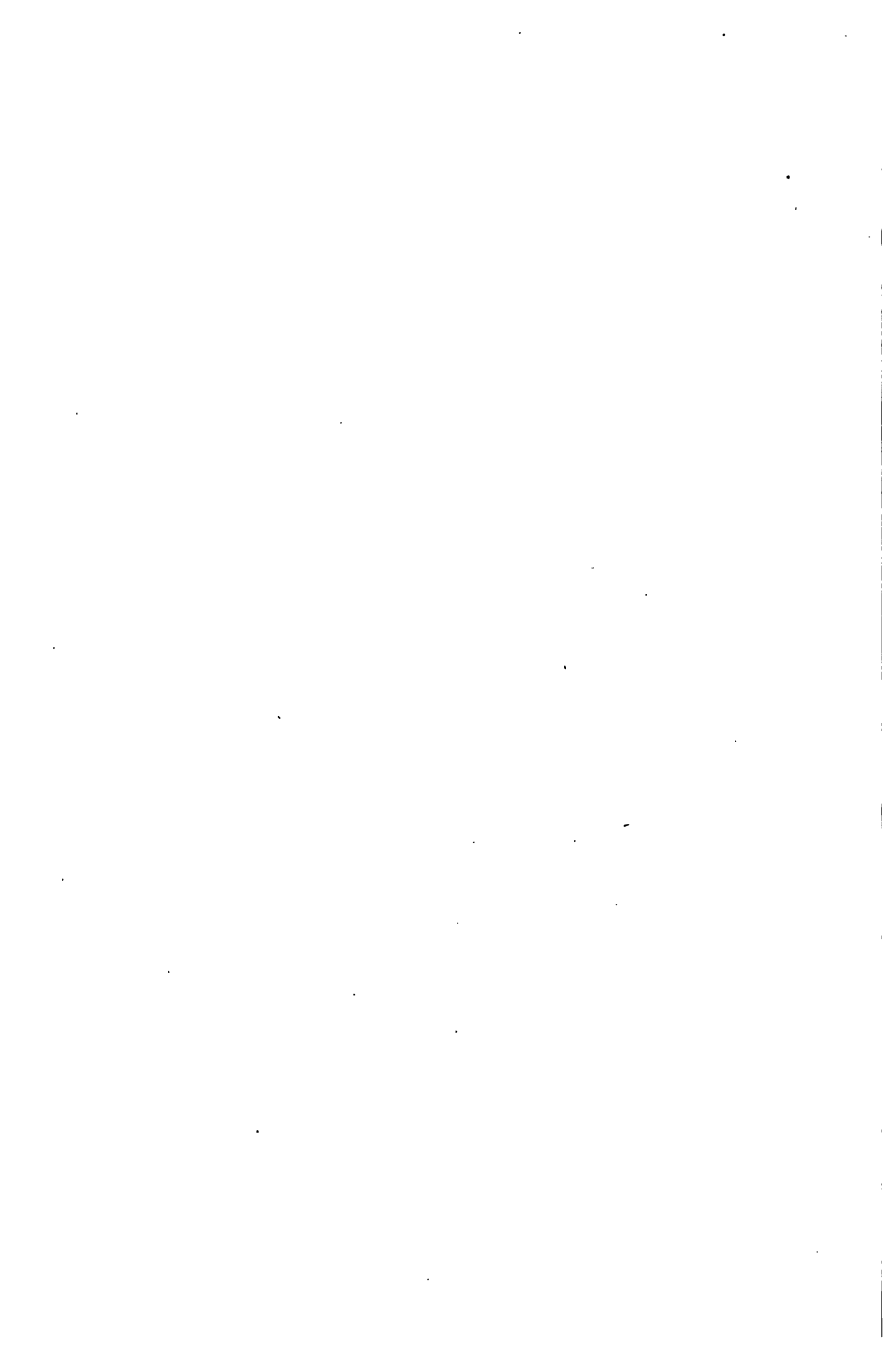
now send forth to the world? In the six stories which it contains there are jumbled up together witches, jackdaws, fairies, pigs, mermaids, magistrates, dwarfs, cock-pheasants, and a great variety of other creatures who do not usually consort together, and could only have been brought into the same book by those wondrous powers of magic which confuse and confound the common order of nature. I have neither the time nor the power to sort them out properly and put each in his own place ; and so, having learned what I knew about them from the Fairies who kindly supply me with information upon such subjects, I have written it down as well as I could, and send out the six stories which contain it, under the fitting title and designation of—‘ Higgledy-Piggledy.’

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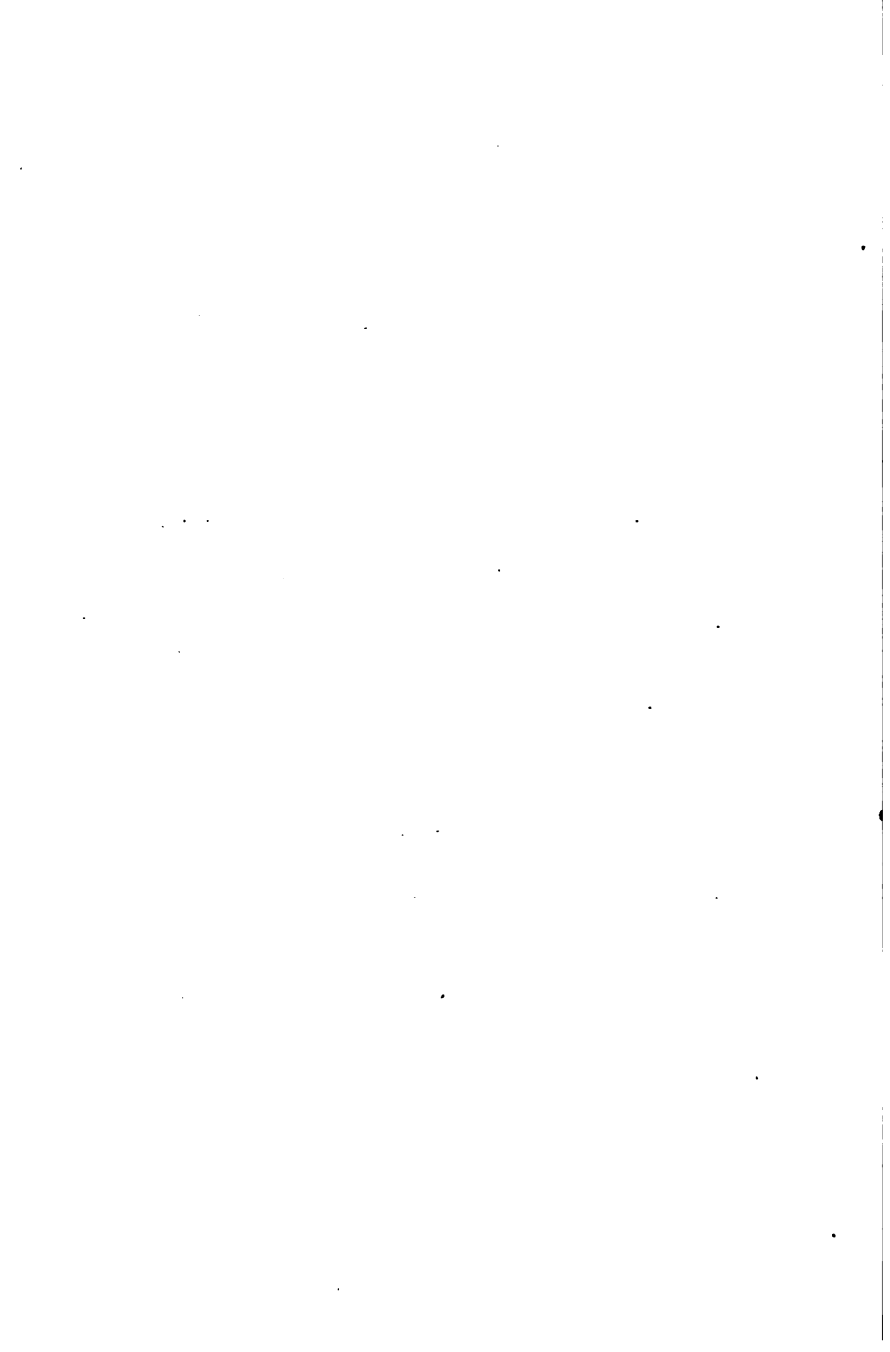




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# HIGGLEDY-PIGGLEDY.

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## THE CRONE OF CHARING.

47  
It was a very cold afternoon. During the previous night a great quantity of snow had fallen, and then Jack Frost had come in to play his part, and bind the snow firmly on to the face of the earth, telling it fairly enough that, as it had chosen to come where it had not been invited, there it should stay and act as a white great-coat to the fields and roads, and trees and hedges, which it had invaded. Then the wind had risen, and, not finding things as cheerful as it expected, had risen higher and higher still, as if determined to blow them into a more pleasant condition. Did it blow? Just *didn't* it! I believe it did—just as if it thought it had got one chance to do so which might not occur again, and had better be made the most of. At all events, whatever the reason, the wind blew keenly and bitterly from the north-east, and hurried the clouds over the face of the sky much faster than any cloud, gifted with the smallest atom of self-respect, could have wished to travel. Not

that there was much object for clouds to stay and dawdle in such a sky as there was on this particular afternoon. The sun, after making a faint pretence of rising at his usual hour in the morning, had apparently tucked his head altogether under the bed-clothes and turned in again, as some young people whom I know would not unfrequently like to do on a cold winter's morning. At all events, he had only come out for a very short time, and had evidently found the world much too dull a place to be worth lighting up with his genial rays. For all one could see, there might just as well have been no sun at all, and the clouds had it all their own way, and drove on before the wind in great, dark, heavy masses, covering the whole face of the sky, and apparently becoming heavier and darker as the day wore away and the evening began to approach.

I began by saying that it was a very cold afternoon, and I said that which was strictly the truth. So, at least, thought old Job Spurling, the carrier from Maidstone to Ashford, as he walked by the side of his horse along the road between Lenham and Charing, and found it a difficult task to keep from freezing as he did so. Anyone who is fortunate enough to know the locality of which I speak, will bear me out in the assertion that a colder or bleaker road would be difficult to find. Sufficiently far from the hill (that famous Back-bone of Kent so often chronicled by the recounter of truthful Fairy legends) to prevent the latter from affording shelter to the traveller, the road runs, for the most of the way, near enough to receive the full effect of the cold breezes

which, in winter weather, sweep along the hillside with chilling influence upon man and beast. Trees are few, hedges small, fields large, and, if bad weather is ever to be encountered, this is one of the places where he who has to encounter it had need to be well prepared beforehand in the matter of great-coats, thick handkerchiefs, and any other device by which cold can be prevented from chilling the bones of frail humanity.

Job Spurling knew the road right well, and knew, moreover, that he had need of all the protection which his great-coat could afford him, to say nothing of the woollen 'comforter' with which the care of his excellent wife had provided him in years gone by, before she had left this world for one in which Job affectionately hoped she would be free from cold. Nevertheless, so bitterly cold was the evening, and so piercing the wind, that no covering seemed effectual to resist its attack. As to sitting in his cart, that had long ago been out of the question, and, as he trudged by the side of his horse, Job felt constrained, every now and then, to stamp violently upon the ground, and even to resort to a species of dance, which ill-accorded with the natural dignity of a carrier, but which was absolutely necessary to prevent his feet from freezing as he went.

It may well be imagined that, under these circumstances, worthy Job was in a frame of mind by no means cheerful, and that his temper was less placid and easy than might have been the case in a different position of affairs. Not to mince matters, Job was becoming decidedly cross as the evening

advanced and his cart did *not*, or, at all events, advanced so slowly as to promise a longer journey than he had expected. Old Sultan the grey horse which for the last five years (ever since he had been sold off from Sir Edward Dering's stable, and bought by Job at a bargain) had drawn this well-known vehicle, found it difficult to stand, more so to move, and, most of all, to draw the cart along at a faster rate than that which is usually known as 'a snail's pace.' He did the best he could, poor old fellow; but even a horse can do no more; and Job knew better than to hurry him, as, should accident befall him, he would have difficulty in replacing so well-tried and useful an animal. So there was nothing for it but to plod wearily on, longing for the time when the little town of Charing should be reached, and a mug of ale have been earned and drank, which would cheer him forward on his road to Ashford.

He was more than half-way between Lenham and Charing, and was pushing on steadily, encouraging Sultan as he went, when a fresh gust of wind, sharper and colder than any he had yet experienced, swept from the hills, and seemed to penetrate to his very marrow. It was really beyond the endurance of mortal carrier, and Job's temper completely gave way under this last assault. 'Burn my old grandfather's boots!' he exclaimed, in tones both loud and vehement; 'how the darned old wind do blow, sure-ly! I never knowed such a night afore, not since I was a born man—drat the weather, say I!'

This outburst on the part of worthy Job had, as may be supposed, not the smallest effect upon the

elements. On the contrary, the wind seemed to howl and rage, if possible, more fiercely than before, and whirled the snow, wherever the latter lay loosely enough for it to do so, into Job's face, as if it had a special spite against him which it had determined to take that opportunity of venting once for all by the most savage and well-sustained assault. 'Drat the wind!' repeated the carrier with renewed energy, and would probably have proceeded to the use of other language, of a similar and even less refined character, had not the current of his thoughts been suddenly changed, and his attention directed to matters which caused him for the moment to forget even the coldness of the weather and the acuteness of his own sufferings.

Sultan, who had been manfully—or rather I should say horsefully—doing his best to drag his master's cart along the snow-encumbered road, now suddenly stopped, set his fore-feet firmly in the ground, and snorted fearfully. Evidently he saw something which surprised or frightened him, and Job Spurling had not long to wait before he saw something too. Approaching from the direction of Charing, and advancing slowly down the middle of the road, came a procession which appeared to be one of considerable length. It was some thirty or forty yards before his cart when Job first became aware of its approach, and for a moment or two he could not, for the life of him, make out what it was. As it drew nearer and nearer, however, and the dim light enabled him to see the objects before him somewhat more distinctly, he perceived, to his intense astonishment, that the procession was one composed entirely of milestones.



Yes ! impossible though it seemed, there could be no doubt of the fact. Walking two-and-two, in solemn silence, like mourners at a funeral, came an apparently interminable procession of real, actual, unmistakable milestones. There could be no doubt about it, and, what was more, they were milestones all more or less connected with that part of the country ; for as they came on, Job could see upon their faces, or fronts, or whatever is the proper name by which to call the upper part of a milestone, letters and figures plainly carved, which indicated the distance from certain places, to show which these stones had been set up at various parts of the road. The number of miles to London, Faversham, Dover, Folkestone, Ashford, and other places, was inscribed on the different milestones, and the astonished carrier almost fancied that he could swear to particular stones which he remembered at particular points in the roads with which he was best acquainted. He had plenty of opportunity, too, of observing them all, for when they came to the spot at which the affrighted Sultan had stopped with the cart in the middle of the road, the procession divided in two, one milestone going on one side, and the other on the other side, of the vehicle, coming together again as soon as they had passed it. Whether they had feet or not was more than Job Spurling was ever able to declare with certainty ; if they had, he did not see them ; if they had not, it was marvellous to see how quietly and gracefully they moved over the ground. Not a milestone stumbled or fell, not one fell out of line, loitered, or interfered with the regular order of their

march, but all went silently and steadily forward, as if they were only taking that natural exercise which, for all I know, may be as good for milestones as for men.

Job was lost in amazement. The first thought that crossed his mind (which was not unnatural for a carrier) was the great trouble which would be caused to travellers by the absence from their places of so many indicators of distance ; they would certainly be terribly missed all along the road, and unless they had warned the local authorities of their intended absence, great inconvenience would inevitably result. This thought, however, was speedily forgotten in the intense wonder which Job felt at so remarkable an occurrence as that which was thus passing under his very eyes. It struck him as more than probable that no human being had ever seen such a thing before. In the tales and legends of Fairy times which had reached the ears of the worthy carrier, animals had been made to speak, trees had been changed into men, and strange mysterious sights had been witnessed by trembling mortals. But surely the wildest imagination which had ever invented a fairy legend had never depicted to itself such an extraordinary incident as that of a grave, sober, generally immovable milestone being suddenly endued with powers of animation, leaving its accustomed position, and abandoning its sacred duty of declaring to travellers their distance from the town to which they journeyed.

And when this appeared to have, nay, certainly *had* (if he was to believe the evidence of his own eyes) been the case not only with one, but with

many milestones at once, it passed even the bounds of ordinary witchcraft, and became something too vast, too wonderful, too awful for human comprehension! With eyes as wide open as a codfish—with trembling limbs and sinking heart, did Job Spurling gaze upon the procession which thus passed him, and it was not until nearly the whole of it had gone by that he plucked up courage to try and discover what was the meaning of the affair, and the reason of the unusual course taken by those who formed the procession.

One of the last milestones which approached him was a stone of mild and peaceful appearance; the moss which time had placed upon its face spoke of age and respectability, and as it told upon its open countenance the relative distances of Ashford, Charing, Maidstone, and London, Job felt that, although at the moment he forgot its particular position, it must doubtless be an old acquaintance, and, being connected with that part of the country, might be disposed to be friendly and communicative. Emboldened by this hope, the good man opened his mouth, and with faltering tones accosted the object which approached him. 'Mr. Milestone,' he said, 'What's up now? Whatever's the row with all of you, and where the dickens be you off to?' At the sound of his voice the milestone stopped suddenly, though at the manifest risk of throwing the whole procession out of order. It stopped, I say, shook itself so violently that Job distinctly saw several pieces of loose moss fall from it to the ground, and in a deep sepulchral voice gave utterance to these words of

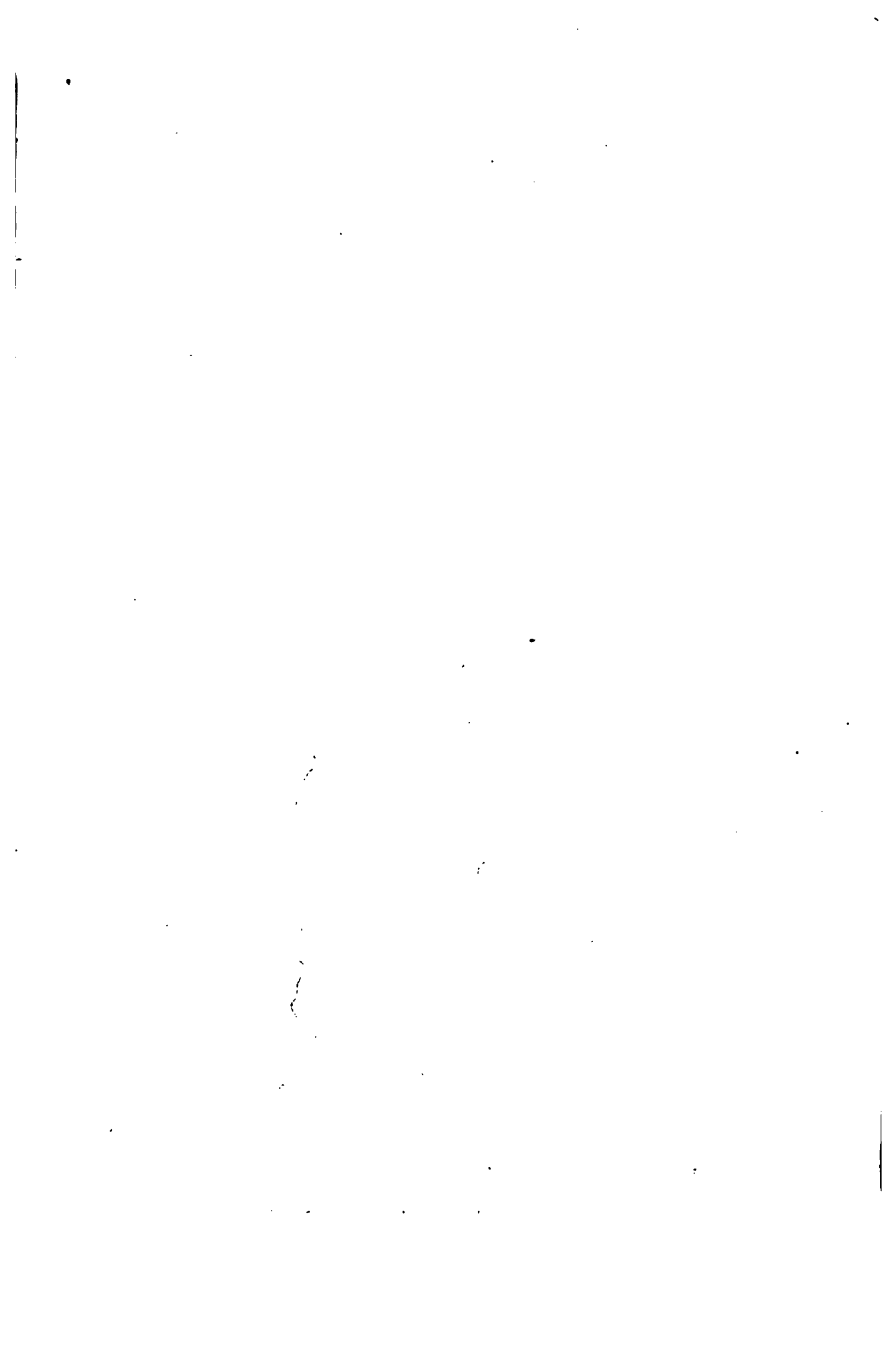
terrible significance : 'The finger-posts are up !' and then resumed its journey, leaving the honest carrier in still greater amazement and perplexity than before. He stood stock-still, alternately shivering and wondering, until the last milestone had passed out of sight, and then he began to think, not without some reason, that standing still there would never bring him on to Charing and Ashford. The worthy Sultan, too, seemed to be of the same opinion, and to have overcome, for the time at least, his objection to proceed. Giving a snort of relief, as if thankful that the strange procession was over, he commenced moving of his own accord, and being encouraged in the attempt by his master, they advanced side by side along the road as heretofore.

Not far, however, had they proceeded, when a shout of wild laughter was borne upon the blast to Job's astonished ears ; this was speedily followed by another and another, and yells and shouts such as those which might have proceeded from a party of ale-house revellers who had outstayed the proper drinking hour, and imbibed more than was good for them, were plainly to be heard. Once again did Sultan suddenly stop, snort fearfully, and fix his forefeet in the ground as if he could not be induced to move forward. Once again did Job stare, fitfully and fearfully, through the dusky atmosphere, and once more was he beyond measure astonished and bewildered at the sight which greeted his eyes.

Coming up the road, nay, rather crowding up, appeared a huge army of finger-posts, evidently gathered from all the Weald of Kent and its neighbourhood.

In fact, the names inscribed upon the fingers, by which I mean the cross pieces of wood at the top of the posts, sufficiently indicated the localities from which they came: Charing, Ashford, Bethersden, Egerton, Smarden and a multitude more names of parishes, well-known to Job, being plainly visible as they approached. Unlike the previous procession, these kept no order and no silence. One would have supposed that upon an occasion important enough to have drawn these public servants from their appointed places, some show of discipline would have been maintained. For instance, well-painted, sound finger-posts from main roads or turnpikes might with propriety have commanded detachments from the cross-roads. Again, the larger posts might have preceded the smaller, or the posts with three or four indicating 'fingers' might have acted as superior officers to those who could only boast of one or two. Nothing of this kind, however, was perceptible in the order of march, which was, in fact, as much of *disorder* as could well be imagined. Four-fingered, three-fingered, and two-fingered posts were all crowded together, reeling one against another in such a way that their fingers frequently became entangled to their mutual danger; upright, strong, new posts forced their way forward, regardless of the old, feeble, and rotten, just as in the world of men, alas! the rich and strong too often pass on their way trampling down the weak and poor who would fain move at their own quiet pace in the same direction.

And as they pressed forward, shouts and cries, cheers and laughter, broke from the approaching





JOB AND THE FINGERPOSTS

throng, and Job could distinctly hear the purport and tenor of some of these. 'Down with the milestones!' they shouted. 'No milestones! Finger-posts for ever!' and the carrier at once awoke to the conviction that this could be nothing else than a regular rebellion of the wooden against the stone indicators of distance. As he had hitherto been unaware of any jealousy or ill-feeling between the two classes, he was infinitely puzzled to know what to make of it, and remained staring with his mouth wide open until the advancing party was close upon him. Never had such an extraordinary sight presented itself to the honest carrier. Strange, indeed, had been the procession of milestones, but there had been something approaching to dignity and even solemnity in the steady silence with which they had gone on their way. But that a set of finger-posts should also be on the move, and should come along the road, roaring and roystering like intoxicated human beings, was altogether wonderful and beyond his powers of comprehension.

For some time he stood speechless with amazement, and very likely would not have found voice to speak nor courage to use it if one awkward lout of a post with three fingers had not knocked off his hat with one of them in passing, and continued to go forward without a word of apology. 'Dash my wig, but that's coming it pretty strong!' cried Job upon the impulse of the moment. 'Be you a finger-post, mate, or what be ye, running against honest folks as never harmed ye?' Now even as Job spoke, the thought came over him that if the old adage 'as deaf



as a post' held good in the present case, his speech might very possibly remain unanswered, and therefore he raised his voice as loud as he could while he uttered the closing words of his sentence. The party addressed, however, was evidently neither deaf nor dumb, for scarcely had the words escaped him, when the carrier saw the finger-post turn round and point at him contemptuously with one of its fingers, upon which was distinctly stated that which was plainly and palpably untrue in its then position, namely, that it was two miles to Tenterden. At the same time, a harsh voice issued from the centre of the post which said in a scornful tone : 'Why here's a mortal ! Neither finger-post nor milestone, I declare ! What's the use of it ? Ha ! Ha !' and in another moment Job found himself the centre of a considerable group of posts, all pointing at him with their fingers, and making as though they would speedily crush him between them.

This prospect was by no means pleasant, nor was Job at all prepared to suffer without resistance. In what manner, however, he could or would have resisted an attack of the kind threatened, was a point which he might have found some difficulty in determining. Fortunately for him, he was not called upon to do so, for at that very moment a remarkably clean, new, spruce finger-post came hurrying up and urged his companions forward. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'we have sure intelligence that the enemy is in force a few miles further on. Pray do not stand dallying here. Every post will be required in the coming struggle, and delay is treason to the cause !'

At these words, the finger-posts around Job appeared to be struck with a sense of shame at their conduct in remaining trifling there when duty required them elsewhere. Turning from Job as from an object unworthy of further notice, and turning, too, so hastily that the unhappy carrier's head ran the greatest risk of being summarily knocked off by their protruding 'fingers,' they formed at once into some kind of line, and pursued their course along the road in the direction previously taken by the milestones.

Job Spurling stood as one thunderstruck, gazing after the retreating finger-posts in the most utter bewilderment. Was he asleep or awake? Was that which had just happened a real, actual occurrence, or was it a dream, a fancy, or something which might have happened a long time ago, in the days of fairies and witches, of which some old woman had told him in his childhood, and which he had just recollected and seen with his 'mind's eye?' The shouts were still in his ears, the sight had scarcely vanished from before his eyes, and his mind was in such a state of confusion as the mind of no carrier had probably ever been before. Ere long, however, the reality of the cold wind was such that he could stand where he was no longer, and after one more appeal to Sultan, to which the latter readily responded, man, horse, and cart steadily advanced upon their road. Their rate of progress, however, was but slow, and nearly an hour elapsed before Charing was approached by the travellers.

Just before they reached that ancient town, Job became aware of a running, shuffling noise behind

him, which caused him at once to turn round in order to ascertain from whence it could possibly proceed. He had not long to look before he perceived the very selfsame finger-post which had so lately jeered at and derided him as a mere mortal. Changed, however, was its appearance and demeanour as it now hurried along the road, sobbing and groaning as it went. Not without cause were its lamentations, as Job speedily perceived. One of its fingers had been wrenched or knocked violently off, another had the letters upon it almost effaced as if by blows, and its whole frame appeared bruised and marked with notches and indentations. Evidently the poor thing had been subjected to severe treatment, and it seemed as though flying in haste from those who had inflicted the same.

Such, indeed, was the case, as Job gathered from the words which the finger-post let fall as it pursued its retreating course: 'Oh dear! oh dear!' it cried; 'how hard these milestones are! I wish I was a hurdle—I wish I was a gate—I wish I was a hog-backed stile! Who'd have thought of an ambush *there*? Oh dear! oh dear! how I ache all over!' and so it passed along, and disappeared amid the shades of the now rapidly-approaching night.

Job at once perceived what had happened: the noisy procession of rebellious finger-posts had evidently fallen into an ambush prepared for them by their enemies, and, from the condition of the fugitive whom he had seen, they had in all probability suffered severely. But if the sagacious carrier had entertained any doubts upon the point, they would speedily have

been set at rest by that which immediately followed. A great and increasing tumult arose behind him, and in a few moments he was overtaken and passed by the whole body of flying finger-posts. Helter-skelter they came on, rushing in mad confusion down the road, with broken fingers, maimed bodies, defaced inscriptions, and bearing the sure and visible tokens of a defeated army.

Poor old Sultan was so terribly alarmed by this noisy column, that his master could with difficulty prevent him from bolting, cart and all, which would certainly have resulted in a serious accident. By standing at his head, however, and keeping tight hold of him, the old horse was kept quiet whilst the finger-posts swept by, although their cries and gesticulations were more than sufficient to have frightened any horse who was not perfectly regardless of all that passed around him. The routed army, moreover, was not unpursued. Hot and heavy upon their heels (if finger-posts can be fairly said to have heels) came the infuriated but triumphant milestones. With hoarse and eager cries they pressed forward upon the flanks of the defeated foe, jumping weightily upon the hindmost, smashing fingers and damaging posts wherever they could come up with them.

Job Spurling stood aghast at this extraordinary spectacle, the like of which he had never imagined even in his wildest dreams. 'Death to traitors!' 'Down with the wooden slaves!' were the cries which rang in his ears, and among the crowd of milestones who presently pounded by him he recognised beyond all doubt the milestone on Hothfield Heath, who, for

many years past, so long as Job knew, had quietly and unobtrusively maintained his position by the side of the turnpike road, charged with the sole and solitary duty of announcing to the world the relative distances of Ashford, Maidstone, and London. Yes ; there it was, beyond all doubt. Job recognised it by several well-known marks, and then and there determined that if that stone ever resumed its original position, he would endeavour to ascertain the meaning of that night's performance by earnest and searching inquiry of one of the actors. He flattered himself that he could see as far into a millstone as any of his neighbours, and although a milestone was not exactly the same thing, he could but do his best, and that best was well worth doing in order to unravel so strange a mystery.

In a very short time the whole array of victors and vanquished had passed beyond the sight and ken of the worthy carrier. Once more he roused the faithful Sultan to action, and in a short quarter of an hour they entered the little town of Charing. At the foot of the hill was the hostelry at which honest Job invariably stayed for refreshment alike for man and beast, and hither accordingly he betook himself at once, benumbed in body by the cold and sore disturbed in mind at the extraordinary occurrences of the evening. So much time had been consumed upon the journey that it was nigh upon eight o'clock before Job drew up at the door of the inn, and, having taken Sultan out for that hour's rest and feed of corn which the good horse had so well earned, walked into the tap-room and called for a hot glass of grog, of which, indeed, he stood strongly in need.

Several other people were in the room, of whom he took little notice until he had obtained and taken a hearty gulp of the liquor which he had ordered. Then he looked round upon the yokels who were seated comfortably over their pipes, ale, and other commodities which the house afforded for the warming of the body and the cheering of the soul, and heaved such a deep sigh as had the effect of immediately attracting to himself the attention of everyone in the room.

‘Why, Master Spurling!’ observed the host, a short, fat, red-faced, bustling little man, who had for the moment seated himself at the end of a form hard by where the carrier stood, but who watched with eager eye the mugs and pots of his company, ready to replenish them at the shortest notice; ‘Why, Master Spurling, what ar’t sighing and groaning about? Methinks ’tis a precious good job for thee to be out of the cold for a while, and a time rather for mirth and jollity than for such doleful sounds!’

‘Alas and alack a day!’ replied the carrier. ‘Thou sayest well, friend Skinner’ (for such was the name by which mine host was known). ‘There is truth in thy words, as ever. But for those who have seen the sight which has greeted mine eyes this blessed night, there is no mirth nor jollity until the matter has been further explained.’

‘What sight?’ ‘What matter?’ eagerly exclaimed half a dozen voices at once, and the host himself quickly replied, ‘An thou has seen ought that may be held to be marvellous or uncommon, Job Spurling, tell it, I pray thee, to this good company forthwith.

It ill befits a man to keep such things within his own breast, and if they are named at all they should be told outright.'

'True,' returned Job with another sigh. 'True; and yet what I have to tell is so passing strange that I know not how to tell it.'

At these words the company, whose curiosity had now become thoroughly aroused, began vehemently to ply the carrier with questions, until he declared that he could by no means tell his tale by means of answers, but that if they would but be silent for a while, they should know all. Thus adjured, the party became silent and allowed Job to tell his tale, which he did without further delay, and thumped his hand so hard upon the table in corroboration of his recital, that the contents of several glasses were summarily reduced by the jar which followed. All listened with breathless interest until Job had quite finished, and then began a titter, which presently broke out into a loud laugh from several present.

'Why, Job, man, you've been dreaming!' said one. 'I reckon he took a good spell and a long drink at the "Dog and Bear" afore he left Lenham,' remarked another. 'What's the good of ro-mancing like that 'ere?' asked a third; and it was but too evident to Job that his story had been received with almost universal incredulity.

He heaved a deep sigh. 'Well, mates,' he said, 'there's no call for ye to believe without ye please. But inasmuch as seeing is believing, I must fain believe what I've seen with my own mortal eyes—and that's all about it!'

'Now, come, Job, man,' remarked the landlord,

'we're all friends here, and no one wishes to disbelieve a worthy old friend such as thou art; but was there ever such a tale as that which thou proposest to us? Milestones and finger-posts to be roaring and rampaging about the country like living creatures? How could such a thing come to pass?'

'I know not, Master Skinner, I know not,' replied Job, shaking his head mournfully as he spoke. 'Truth to tell, had another told me that such a sight had been seen by himself, I would scarce have believed it, had it been my own brother—which, by the way, it could scarce have been, since poor Tom has been dead and buried this forty year come Michaelmas. But when a thing happens to oneself, what can one say or do?'

'The man speaks fair enough,' said an old rustic who had hitherto kept silence; 'and, to my mind, there's no drink about him. Perchance there is more in this tale than we wot of.'

'Ay? say you so, Master Chambers?' rejoined the host. 'Thou art well skilled in matters of ancient learning, and knowest much of what perplexes and puzzles younger men. Can'st thou say ought which may throw light upon this strange occurrence?'

Thus directly addressed, the old man took his pipe out of his mouth, shook his head very gravely, and then spoke as follows: 'I know not—I know not,' he said. 'Folks that pretend to know more than they do, or who seek to know more than they ought, are but fools for their pains. But this I *do* know, that there is much going on around us which is beyond the ken of common men. Have we not



heard of the witches who travel on broomsticks through the air? Have we not been told of staves and staffs which, without being held by visible hands, have sorely beaten those who had offended against the powers of magic? And know we not well that those powers have much influence and authority all along our old hill? Who can say but that magic has been at work to-night, and that Job Spurling has really seen the strange sight he tells of? Remember, friends, where we are, and who dwells near us.'

As the old man concluded his words, a visible shudder ran through his audience, and a low whisper began amongst them, as if some idea had seized upon their minds to which they had not courage to give expression in words. One word, however, was muttered through the circle, and gradually became audible to anyone who might have been listening. 'The Crone—the Crone—he means the Crone,' was the sentence which was whispered around, and all trembled as they spoke. For, in truth, the Crone of Charing was a formidable personage, well known and much dreaded by the peasantry of those parts. Who, what, or of what age she was might not be known; it was sufficient that she was a tall, gaunt old woman, who had her habitation in some of the fastnesses of the great Longbeach woods, and to whom was attributed every misfortune which fell upon the people of Charing and the neighbouring villages. Not that any particular damage had ever been directly traced to her, nor, indeed, had the inhabitants of that neighbourhood been especially unfortunate, but the Crone of Charing had, somehow or other, acquired that bad name which

is proverbially supposed to lead to the strangling of a dog, or, at all events, to reduce him to such a condition that he might as well be hanged off-hand. No one had a good word for her, and yet few dared to say a word against her, such was the mingled fear and hatred with which folks of those days regarded a person to whom the name and character of a witch had once been given.

The only thing, however, which could at all associate the Crone with Job Spurling's story was her extraordinary habit of sitting upon milestones. Constantly during the summer afternoons, and especially when evening was coming on, the singular figure of the old dame might be seen seated upon a milestone, her fingers generally most busily employed in knitting. She selected no one milestone for her habitual seat, but sat indiscriminately upon any which she happened to fancy at the moment ; and this, coupled with the fact that she was seldom seen walking to the place, and always waited until dark, when no one was about, before she left it, increased and encouraged the general idea of her supernatural character. Sometimes at one spot, sometimes at another, she was to be found by those who sought her, but invariably upon a milestone. This circumstance, which suddenly occurred to the rustic party upon the words of old Chambers, gave them some slight suspicion that, if any belief at all was to be attached to the extraordinary tale of Job Spurling, it might be connected in some mysterious manner or other with the famous Crone of Charing.

The suggestion, however, had the effect of stopping further gossip upon the subject. Mine host,

fearful that what had passed might empty his tap-room, and thus prevent the emptying of his bottles, made vigorous efforts to change the conversation, and succeeded sufficiently well to prevent the mischief which he had anticipated. An air of doubt and heaviness, however, appeared to pervade the party, and the talk was of a less lively and careless description than was usually the case in that pleasant little room. This became apparent to Job Spurling, who, moreover, could not but feel that he had been the unfortunate, though involuntary cause of the change. Like a worthy fellow as he was, therefore, he determined to shorten his stay, and to leave the others to enjoy themselves without the burden of his presence. One more tumbler of grog he thought he had earned, and a good strong one too, considering that he had still a six miles' journey through the cold, and this he called for without further delay.

When he had duly discussed it, and finished a pipe which he also thought might tend to enable him to face the night with greater powers of endurance, he wished the company 'good evening' and prepared to take his departure. Sultan was taken out of the stable (wherein he would doubtless much rather have stayed), and having been duly fastened to the cart, the carrier was about to recommence his journey, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and turning round he encountered the earnest gaze of old Chambers.

'Job, my man,' said the latter, 'I would fain have one word with thee before thou startest on thy journey.'

'Say on, Master Chambers, say on,' replied the

carrier, but, an' it be your will, let the word be short and sweet; like a donkey's gallop. I am late enough already, and the good folks of Ashford are like to be put out if I reach not the town till two hours after my usual time.'

'Care not thou for that,' rejoined the venerable man. 'Thou hast seen strange sights to night, and my advice to thee is to keep them to thyself. A prating tongue makes mischief to its owner, and there are things which a man may see and hear, but concerning which he does well to be silent. I have known men called warlocks and wizards—ay, and roughly treated as such, and all for having seen, or pretended to have seen, things not half so strange as those which thou hast doubtless witnessed. Keep a wist tongue, Job, keep a wist tongue, and thou wilt do well.'

So saying, the old man turned away, and was apparently about to re-enter the house, when Job, who had listened to his speech with the respect due to his years and reputed wisdom, bethought him that it would be well to thank him for the same.

'Thank ye kindly, Master Chambers,' he said, 'I doubt not but that thou judgest rightly. And yet it goes against the grain for an honest out-spoken man of Kent to bury within his heart all the uncommon things he may chance to see, and keep them hidden like a kernel within a nutshell.'

'So it may, Job Spurling,' returned the other, 'but what is against the grain is sometimes the best and safest, and thou hast had no one to support thee as a witness in this case, so that it would be thy word against all reason and probability, wherefore thou

mayest well say on the morrow that thou didst but invent an idle tale to amuse the tavern folk.'

'That will I never!' cried sturdy Job. 'What? eat my own words and own me a liar? No, Father Chambers, not for Job Spurling. And as to witness—why, I'll tell thee what! If any more should chance to occur to-night, an' thou wilt mount the cart and come with me, thou thyself shalt be witness to me! Thou shalt see, moreover, that the milestones are not in their usual places along the road, and notably the milestone on Hothfield Heath thou shalt find absent. Come, old friend, climb up, and let us be off at once.'

'How can that be?' exclaimed the old man, 'when I have not prepared myself for a night journey, which to a man of my time of life is a serious matter.'

'Never mind,' cried Job, delighted with the sudden idea of having a companion for the rest of his journey, and determined to secure him if possible. 'Never mind, there is plenty of straw in the cart, which, moreover, has a right good covering to keep out the cold, and with a good great-coat, and a couple of sacks over thy knees, thou wilt be as warm as a toast. Climb up.'

'At these words the old man seemed to hesitate, as if half persuaded by the carrier's eloquence. 'Well,' he said, 'to be sure I've got my great-coat on, and living as I do all alone, there is no one to be put out or frightened at my absence from home. I have half a mind, Job, to come along with thee as thou proposest.'

‘Never think twice about it,’ exclaimed the other. ‘Up with thee, Master Chambers, up with thee!’

And so saying he took the old man by the arm, and helped him up into the front part of the cart, where he made him as comfortable a seat as he could arrange, and after having overcome Sultan’s manifest disinclination to renew his journey, they set off in the direction of Ashford.

As night drew in, the weather had somewhat changed. The wind, to use a Kentish word, had ‘segged,’ i.e. lulled, and no longer swept bitterly over the open country as before, and indeed the road on the Ashford side of Charing was altogether less bleak and exposed. The sun having so entirely failed to light or cheer the day with his powerful rays, had long since retired to rest, and the moon was now trying her softer influences upon the weather. Stars had also come out in considerable numbers to see what was going on, so that upon the whole there was every appearance that the rest of the night would be bright and fine, although quite as cold as the travellers could desire. They made themselves as comfortable as they could, and Job Spurling, having mounted up by the side of Chambers, felt much the happier for having a companion. He forthwith began to enlarge upon the occurrences of the evening, and stoutly maintained the truth of every word which he had said in the tap-room.

‘And you shall see, Master Chambers,’ concluded he, after an animated description of the headlong flight of the finger-posts and pursuit of the triumphant milestones, ‘you shall see that as we pass along the

road we are about to travel, there will be no milestones in their places. What will have become of them I cannot say, but they never will be got back yet after such a row as they've been in to-night.'

His companion replied little to this remark. He had a long, loose great-coat, which he kept wrapped round him as well as he could, and appeared more careful about this than about the subject which honest Job would fain have enlarged upon at greater length. Another subject, however, soon demanded the attention of the carrier, for Sultan, who had borne himself so bravely all the journey, now either became so sluggish or so weary that he could apparently hardly drag the cart along the road. This unusual failure on the part of his well-tried animal somewhat disturbed the mind of worthy Job, and he began to pay attention to his steed, to the exclusion of other matters. Sultan strained and laboured mightily, but yet the cart made slow progress, and it was evident that the good folks of Ashford would have to wait for their Maidstone parcels until a later hour than usual. All of a sudden, Job happened to look up, and saw that they were passing the spot where a milestone usually stood, and not only so, but that there stood the milestone just as usual, quietly and unobtrusively doing his duty after the fashion of his kind.

'Odds bodikins!' cried Job. 'Here's one of them, then, who wasn't in the battle, at all events. To see him look so calm and still and quiet, one would never believe that a milestone could move from its place, would one, Master Chambers?'

'Surely not, surely not,' replied the other, chuck-

ling as he spoke. 'It's all right, gossip Job, an' thou stick'st to what I told thee, there's none will believe thou hast seen aught out of the common way, and no evil will befall thee.'

'Not so,' responded the sturdy fellow, 'I will tell no lie, and hide no truth, friend Chambers. This milestone may have been left behind, or may have refused to leave his place, and no fool either. But as to the next we come to, just upon Hothfield Heath, I will swear that I saw him in the very thick of the battle. Over and over again have I passed him in my journeys 'twixt Maidstone and Ashford, and should know him among a thousand. Mark my words, that stone is not in its place to-night, Master Chambers, just see if it is.'

To this observation his companion only replied by an inarticulate murmur from amid the folds of the wrapper which he had wound round his neck, and they said no more to each other until they came close upon Hothfield Heath, poor Sultan meanwhile toiling and moving forward with efforts that were visibly painful. Thus they slowly approached the spot upon which was generally to be seen the particular milestone with which Job Spurling was so intimately acquainted. Judge of his surprise and astonishment when he beheld the milestone standing in its usual place as soberly and sedately as usual, and bearing no signs of having ever moved one single inch from the position which it had filled, satisfactorily and respectably, for many years past.

'Goodness gracious me!' cried Job, and startled at the same moment by a groan which burst from his



companion as he uttered the words, would doubtless have asked him at once whether anything ailed him, had not his attention been suddenly called elsewhere. There was something standing there besides the milestone! Leaning against it, with her arms a-kimbo, and glaring with evil eyes at the approaching cart and its occupants, stood the figure of a woman.

It was not a tall figure, but rather the contrary—somewhat stout—very red-faced, and dressed, as far as Job could see, in a gown of ordinary materials, such as were generally worn by the peasant-women of that day, and with a scarlet cloak over its shoulders. But the expression of the features of this figure was very wicked, and it needed no second glance to tell you that she was one of a bad sort. Under her arms was tucked a long broom-stick, and she glared defiantly at the travellers as they drew near.

Job, though naturally a brave man, trembled from head to foot when he perceived this unpleasant person, and was about to nudge his companion and call his attention to the figure, when something happened so entirely unexpected as to take his very breath away with surprise. Up rose by his side the fellow-traveller with whom he had been journeying in so friendly a manner, threw off the loose great-coat in which he had hitherto been enveloped, and disclosed to the astounded Job, not the features of old Master Chambers, but those of a tall, gaunt woman, in whom he had but little difficulty in recognising the celebrated Crone of Charing. In one single instant the truth flashed across his mind, and he understood the cause of Sultan's disinclination to start and difficulty

in drawing the witch-laden cart along the road. *Master Chambers had never left the tap-room!* It was the Crone herself, who, in his likeness, had accosted Job at the door of the inn, had led him on to offer her a lift, and even suffered him to help her into the cart, because, thought Job (for so he had been taught), these creatures cannot enter the houses or carriages of honest mortals unless the latter shall themselves assist them over the threshold or into the vehicle.

Why or wherefore the old Crone should have desired to travel in Job Spurling's cart, when she could have gone to her destination, one would have supposed, so much more easily by some magical conveyance, is a question which Job could not then answer, and which I frankly own myself unable to determine now. The carrier's cart was the conveyance, at all events, which she preferred, and in which she travelled that night, and so it came to pass that the unlucky carrier found himself apparently in a position of very great peril and discomfort, with a witch beside him in his cart, and, as far as he could judge, another standing by the side of the road. It seemed for a moment that he was thus caught between two fires, and could scarcely expect to escape from one or other.

It was but for a moment, however, that this idea prevailed in Job's mind, if, indeed, the fright which possessed him allowed any idea at all to be present therein. His fellow-traveller, upon whose shoulders appeared a gray cloak, similar in all but colour to that worn by the other dame, drew forth a broomstick which she had hitherto kept concealed beneath

the loose great-coat, flourished it wildly above her head, in dangerous proximity to that of Job, and, as she stretched herself to her full height, cried out in shrill and unearthly tones through the night air—  
'Here stands the Mother of Milestones! Hurrah for the Crone of Charing!'

Hardly were the words out of her mouth, when the figure, which had hitherto remained motionless by the milestone, stretched out its right hand and defiantly snapped its fingers at the speaker, whilst in its left hand the broom-stick appeared, tightly grasped, as if ready for immediate use if necessary. At the same time, in a gruff, deep voice, which seemed to proceed from the lower abyss of some deep pit, the following words were growled forth in answer to those which had just been spoken: 'Ho! for the Hag of Hothfield Heath! Fix the Finger-posts and mizzle with your Milestones!'

No more words were interchanged between the two dames; with surprising agility the Crone of Charing sprang past Job, whose hat she knocked off in doing so, leapt first upon the wheel and then to the ground, and, without more ado, rushed furiously upon her adversary. It was a curious, and yet a terrible, sight. Here were two creatures, in the shape and dress of females of a certain age, in the middle of night, beneath the wintry sky, upon the wild plain of Hothfield Heath, each armed with a stout broom-stick, belabouring each other with might and main. This was curious enough, but what made it terrible was the frightful and demoniac expression of the faces of both the combatants, and the exceedingly bad

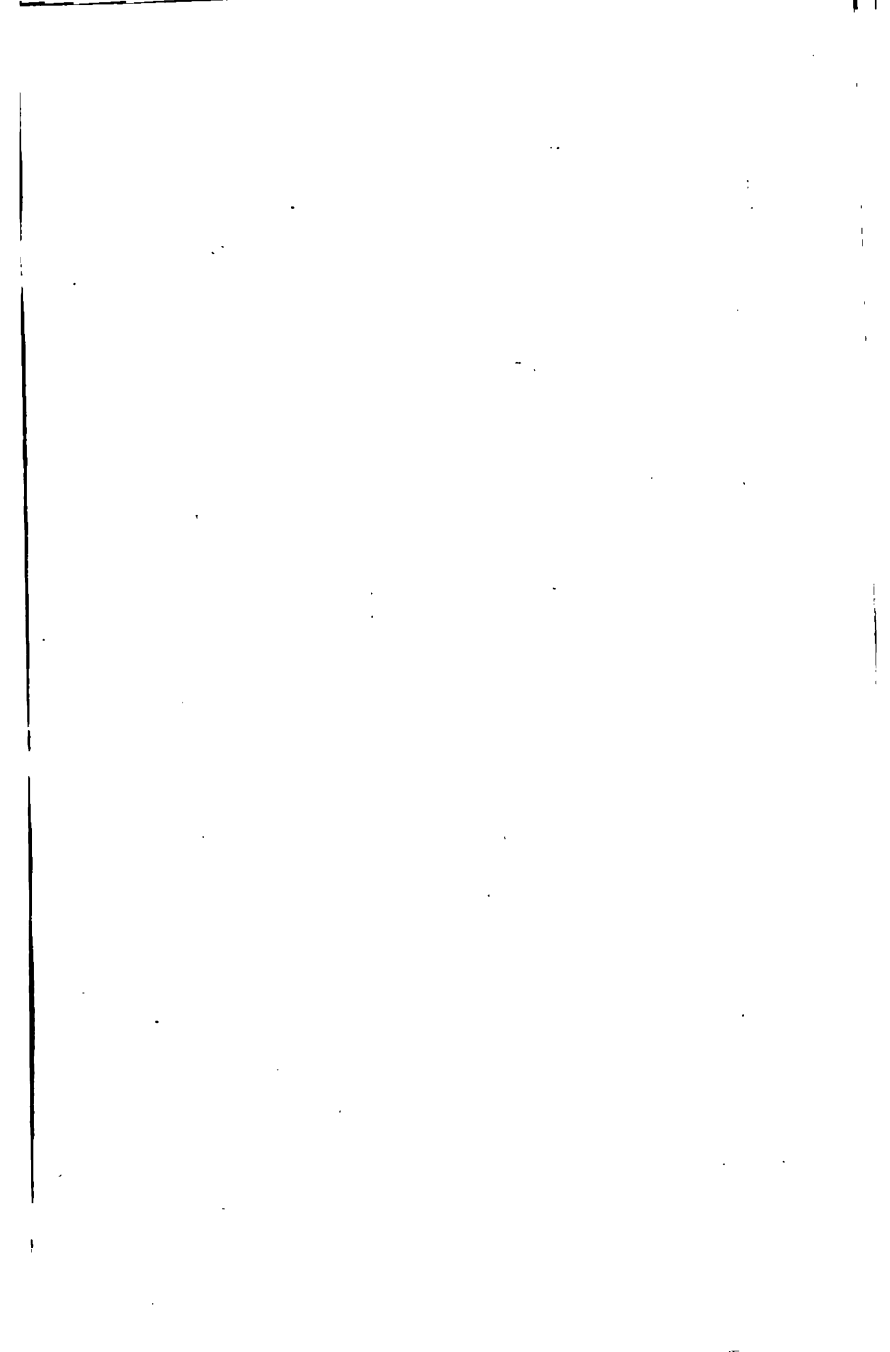
language which they used towards each other—language, indeed, of too bad a character to be transcribed in the pages of a respectable book. There was no bad name under the sun which they did not apply to each other, and their vocabulary of abuse appeared to be really inexhaustible. Behind them, as they fought, the ground sloped gradually up towards the east and south-east, covered with fern, and dotted about with small thorn-trees as far as the crest of the higher knoll, upon which stood a group of larger trees, at a distance of about a quarter of a mile from the fray. To the south and south-west the Heath sloped downwards, and the ground bore plenty of rushes, and was evidently of a more soft and swampy character.

Such was the scene upon which the astounded Job gazed, his attention being so entirely rivetted upon the two old dames that he could think of nothing else. For a few moments neither seemed to gain a substantial advantage over the other, and, as each appeared to be equally resolute, the combat might probably have lasted for some considerable time but for the occurrence I am about to relate. As he gazed in awe-struck wonderment on the battle, Job suddenly became aware of some dark object stealing along by the side of the road from the direction of Ashford, and almost directly afterwards became assured of the fact that this was none other than the finger-post which stood at the cross-road a short distance further on, indicating the distance to Hothfield Place and Surrenden Dering. Attracted, in all probability, by the sound of the conflict, this post appeared

to have left its place, and was evidently coming on with the intention of taking part in the fray.

At that very moment, however, to the utter surprise and astonishment of Job Spurling, the milestone, near which the two dames were fighting, suddenly, and as if with a mighty effort, raised itself from the ground, and, poising itself slowly but steadily in the air, went like a battering-ram against the Hag of Hothfield Heath. As that worthy personage had her head turned away from the milestone at that moment, it followed that she received a blow behind, which mightily confused and astonished her. Nay, it did more, as anyone will readily understand who can imagine himself or herself suddenly struck by the flat top of a milestone immediately below the small of the back. It pushed her forward with such precipitancy upon her antagonist, that the latter had only just time to step aside and allow her to fall prostrate upon the ground, which was the actual result of this extraordinary assault committed by the milestone.

The Crone of Charing, however, profited little by the onslaught, for even as she stepped back, the advancing finger-post swung cleverly round, and brought one of its fingers so roughly in contact with her head as to stretch her upon the ground by the side of her prostrate foe. The finger-post, however, had probably not calculated upon what was to follow, for the very next instant the milestone was upon him. Job saw the encounter of stone against wood, and the result could hardly be doubtful. Chips flew from the unhappy post, every remaining vestige of white paint





THE 'CRONE' AND THE 'HAG' IN MORTAL COMBAT

was rubbed off his front, his whole body was bruised and shaken from head to foot, and, in a shorter time than it takes me to write it, he was scuttling back as fast as he could to his appointed position upon the cross-road, probably lamenting, as much as it is in the power of a post to lament, that he had ever left it. Then, almost before Job could look round, by some mysterious process the milestone had replaced itself in its original position, and no one who had not witnessed the scene which I have just described would have believed that it had ever moved an inch.

Job Spurling could hardly believe his own eyes, which he vehemently rubbed, as if *they* must have been in fault to have witnessed such marvellous things. Even as he did so, the two recumbent dames suddenly raised themselves, and confronted one another in a sitting posture. For a moment each was silent, as if breath and speech had both been knocked out of them by the severe blow which each had received. Then, as if with returning consciousness came the renewed desire of strife, the right hand of each was raised, and silently, but with intense bitterness, shaken at the other. Hereupon each found her tongue, and at the same moment used it without delay.

‘Thou scraggy hop-pole of Longbeach! A fig for thee and thy milestones!’ cried the Hag of the Heath.

‘Fat sow of Hothfield!’ ejaculated her adversary. ‘Thy finger-posts shall be firewood anon.’

And even as they spoke, both the old dames rose from the ground, grasped their broomsticks firmly,



and prepared to renew the battle. But Job, who had all this time remained speechless with mingled fear and wonder, now deemed it high time to interfere. He was too wise a man to interfere with the quarrels of women, so long as they were confined to that legitimate weapon of warfare which only wounded with words, and which, if a man is ever rash enough to meddle in such a case, is generally turned against the intruding male by both the contending parties. But the scandal of seeing two elderly females belabour each other with broomsticks was too great even for a man of the carrier's placid temperament, and, although these were no ordinary females, he thought it inconsistent with his manhood to remain any longer a silent spectator of the scene.

'Stay your hands, dames,' he cried aloud. 'Stay your hands, and for Heaven's sake wrangle no more. Holy Saint Bridget—!' and here Job stopped short in utter amazement. For hardly had he uttered his first words when a shrill, unearthly cry as of pain broke from the lips of each of the old women.

Instantly, and as if compelled to do so by some mysterious power, they ceased from hostile demonstrations against one another, and each at once, trembling and shaking, got astride of her broomstick. And as Job let fall his last exclamation, with another shrill cry, each mounted in the air, and moaning strangely, left the field of battle, the Crone betaking her to the line of country towards Charing, and the Hag flitting like a night-bird up the Heath. At the same moment another circumstance recalled Job's confused brain to the concerns of ordinary life. Sul-

tan, who during the strange scene which had been occupying his master's attention had remained motionless, as if made of stone or wood (unendowed with the marvellous attributes of those milestones and finger-posts whose movements had been witnessed by Job), now all of a sudden returned to life and animation, and that so entirely that, as if some spell had hitherto restrained him, but had just been broken, he set off, with his cart and master, hard all down the road. Job seized the reins, but found himself utterly unable to restrain the animal. Forward he rushed along the flat ground beyond Hothfield Heath, paused not even at the steep hill before Potter's Corner was reached, flew rather than ran between the woods on either side, with the cart rattling behind him as though it would speedily come to pieces, dashed down the hill on the other side, and scarcely slackened pace until he had left Ripton Farm on the right hand and found himself at the very entrance of the good old town of Ashford. There at last he seemed to think he was tolerably safe, but still kept up such a sharp trot that Job found it difficult to steer him round the awkward corner which led from that end of the town into the High Street, and when, much later than his usual time, the carrier rattled up to the door of the 'Saracen's Head,' the old horse, as the ostler expressed it, was 'all of a lather,' and, cold as the night was, the occurrences he had witnessed and the excitement he had undergone had made the master almost as warm as the horse.

So unusual was it to see the steady carrier in such a perturbed condition, that the few people who were about at that hour were somewhat sur-

prised, and questioned him much as to the cause. Now had Job followed the advice which had been given him by the pretended Chambers, and said nothing about the strange scenes which he had witnessed, it would probably have saved him much trouble and discomfort. It would have been easy enough to have invented some excuse for the bolting of Sultan, and if that had not been sufficient to allay the curiosity of the towns-people, it would even have been better to have submitted to their first opinion, namely, that the carrier had been indulging more than was his wont in spirituous liquors, in order to keep out the cold, and that 'having had a drop too much' he had fancied that he had seen things which never really existed, and believed he had witnessed the occurrence of circumstances which had in truth never occurred. But to this course worthy Job was by no means inclined. His reputation for truthfulness and sobriety was rightly dear to him, and moreover a certain obstinacy of disposition impelled him to persevere in the line of conduct which he had at first adopted, and to stick to the truth of his story in every particular, no matter what could be said against its probability, or whether his hearers believed him or not.

The consequence was that before noon on the following day, which chanced to be market-day, the wonderful story of Job Spurling and his adventures was known all over Ashford, and was the common topic of conversation among all the gossips of the town. In the days of which we are telling, such a matter as this could not but be considered as one of weighty import. The belief in witches and wizards

was almost universal, and no effort was spared by the authorities to root out such a belief from the land. True, their exertions were generally ineffectual, as is and always has been the attempt to put down a popular belief by persecution. Wherefore the whipping of people who had declared themselves to have consorted or even spoken with the dealers in magic arts under any pretext whatsoever, had no more effect upon the general public than the ducking, drowning, hanging or burning of unfortunate old creatures who laboured under the dark suspicion of being witches or wizards. The thing still went on, and as the authorities for the most part believed in witchcraft themselves, and alternated between punishing those who were reputed to be witches, and those who avowed their belief in them, no satisfactory result seemed likely to be achieved. Be that as it might, however, the Ashford bench of magistrates had always shown themselves particularly zealous in the pursuit and detection of witches and their friends, and such a case as this was not likely to escape them.

Now matters of justice were in those days very differently treated from their treatment in the present day. Indeed, those who are conversant with magisterial affairs in our time, and who are aware of the great amount of legal knowledge possessed by every magistrate (in consequence, doubtless, of the judicious care with which they are selected and appointed), of the calm dignity and impartiality with which they administer justice, and of their great skill and appreciation of the laws of evidence, will pause with wonder as he reflects upon the different state of things which

once existed in this happy land of ours. There was, certainly, alas! a time when, as regarded the business of petty sessions, county magistrates were almost entirely in the hands of the solicitor who acted as their clerk, when his sometimes limited knowledge of law far exceeded the collective knowledge of the bench, and when a prisoner, brought with his sanction and in the custody of the constable before that august tribunal, was practically considered as a guilty man, upon whom lay the burden of proving his innocence. The clerk, too, contrary to those of the present day, rather encouraged the increase of magisterial business than otherwise, and lost no opportunity of having people arrested who were reported to him as having brought themselves within the meshes of the law, whilst the constables, full of their own importance, and zealously active in the performance of their duty, let no one escape whom they could possibly catch without undue trouble or an acuteness which nature had denied them.

The Ashford bench was certainly no worse, and very likely somewhat better, than its neighbours, but still it was not precisely the tribunal before which an innocent man would desire to be tried, and great was Job Spurling's confusion and terror when he was summoned upon the second day after his adventure to appear before the magistrates at their weekly meeting. Refusal was of course out of the question, equally so flight, wherefore honest Job made up his mind to go through with it, though what the upshot would be caused him many an unquiet thought.

The day arrived, and it was one not particularly

fortunate for the carrier. For immediately before his case was called on, the Bench had been occupied with that of a labouring man, who, having had the produce of his garden almost entirely destroyed by rabbits, had wickedly and feloniously, and without having a license to carry arms, shot, killed, and destroyed one of the thieves in the very act of plunder. This crime, the heinous character of which had been aggravated by the fact of its having been committed by moonlight, had justly irritated the minds of the justices against the offender. He pleaded, indeed, that he had a wife and five children, to whom the produce of his garden had been a matter of consequence, but was duly met with the undeniable statement that he should have thought of his wife and children before breaking the law, and had received such condign punishment as his offence had merited.

The magistrates, therefore, had been somewhat chafed and vexed before Job's case came on, and finding crime so rife in the district, were little disposed to regard any accused person with undue leniency. It was not quite certain, however, of what crime Job was to be accused. Mr. Wilyman, the clerk, had ordered him to appear before the Bench without obtaining any regular summons, in which the offence with which he was charged should have been duly stated. Things were somewhat irregularly done in those days, and so poor Job was ushered into the presence of the justices without any clear notion of the charge against him, although pretty certain that it had some connection with his recent adventures. Indeed, it would have puzzled anybody, and *did*

puzzle both their worships and their clerk, to define the precise offence which Job had committed.

There was a certain bye-law in force in the town of Ashford, under a local act of Parliament, by which a man could be fined for being found drunk in the town, and if the magistrates had chosen to laugh at the whole affair, and fine the carrier upon this charge, the matter might have ended there and then. But the temptation of having to deal with a witch case was too great for them, and they were resolved, if possible, to have such a charge brought against Job as should compel investigation into the whole business, and possibly bring credit and honour upon themselves for probing it thoroughly to the very bottom. So when they saw the worthy carrier placed before them as a prisoner, Mr. Splutterbuck, their chairman, bellowed at him at once with a loud voice and threatening manner, and asked him whether he was not ashamed of himself. Job meekly enquired why he should be, for which, had he lived in our times, he would probably have been immediately sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment for contempt of court. Fortunately for him, this idea never entered the heads of the worthy justices or their clerk, and Job was therefore only subject to a fresh burst of wrath from Mr. Splutterbuck, and a murmur of righteous indignation from his colleagues.

Seeing that no one had as yet advanced anything against him, the sturdy carrier waxed somewhat bolder, and at last, finding his voice, exclaimed in a respectful tone of remonstrance, 'Please, your worships, I ha'n't done nothink wrong as I knows on.'

‘Nothing wrong!’ exclaimed the angry chairman in a loud voice. ‘It will be well for you if so it turns out. But perhaps you and I may differ upon that point;’ and so saying, he turned to consult the clerk as to the charge under which the prisoner stood before them.

Hereupon there occurred a notable difference of opinion, one worthy magistrate holding that to have carried a witch in his cart was a clear case of petty larceny, whilst another thought that it came within the law of trespass. One there was, indeed, for bringing it in treason at once, and sending it to a superior court, whilst a fourth held to the opinion that the game laws had somehow or other been infringed. After a while, however, the clerk pointed out that there would be considerable difficulty in applying the law in the manner which their worships desired, and that the safer course would be to accuse the prisoner generally of having consorted with witches and such-like evil persons; and if this could not be brought home to him, to put him in the stocks for having circulated false reports tending to the public injury. There was, it is true, no particular statute under which they could legally do this; but no one was likely to take objection, and such things were not unfrequently done in those ‘good old days.’ Therefore, after their long conference had been brought to a conclusion, Squire Splutterbuck addressed Job, and told him that he was accused of having been in the company of witches and other evildoers of the like kind, and that he must be prepared to answer for the same.



‘Lackadaisy me, sir!’ answered poor Spurling. ‘What be I to say or do in such a case as this? I’re an honest man as pays my way, and don’t owe nobody nothink. There aint no one here as has had less to do with witches and sich-like, till such times as one on ’em come up into my cart t’other evening on a false pretence, as one might say.’

‘You own, then,’ asked the chairman, ‘to having taken up a known witch to ride by your side in your cart?’

‘Own it?’ cried Job. ‘I don’t own no such thing. The party as I took up was as like old Master Chambers as two peas, and Master Chambers I believed it to be surely till such times as she busted right out o’ the cart and made at t’other.’

Their curiosity having been aroused by these words, the magistrates proceeded to direct Job to make a clean breast of it and tell all he knew, which he very readily did. One old justice hereupon became rather confused, giving it as his opinion that to alter the position of a milestone was something akin to removing your neighbour’s landmark, and that if Job had seen this done without remonstrance, or striving to prevent it, he had clearly been guilty of compounding a felony. However, as this gentleman came from Romney Marsh, where queer customs and curious ideas have prevailed from time immemorial, nobody paid much attention to his remarks, which he nevertheless continued to make to himself, at intervals, with much satisfaction.

But the chairman, after talking for a short time confidentially to the clerk, and at his suggestion en-

tirely overruling the view of another justice to the effect that Job had brought himself within the penalties prescribed for night-poaching, turned to the carrier and thus addressed him : ' Job Spurling, by your own confession you have, in the first place, witnessed occurrences which you ought immediately to have reported to the parish constable, and your neglect to do which might have been fraught with most serious danger to Our Sovereign Lord the King, his Crown and dignity. In the second place, you have also, by your own confession, consorted with evil creatures called witches, and even carried one in your own cart. What have you to say why the Court should not at once adjudge you guilty of a misdemeanour ? '

' Miss or Missis, I know not,' answered the poor carrier, somewhat misunderstanding the words of the worthy magistrate. ' There she were in the cart, sure enough, but how were I to know whether she were witch or no witch, let be as how she were for all the world the same to look at as old Master Chambers. One of you gem'men might be a witch for aught such a poor fellow as I could tell, and how should I refuse if he asked for a ride in my cart ? '

' Thou art malapert, carrier Spurling, thou art malapert,' returned the other, ' and methinks a few hours in the stocks would cool thy hot temper and teach thee to be more discreet. Ho ! constable, bear him hence and set him in the stocks for three hours, until the clock strike four.'

At this sentence Job loudly protested that he had done no wrong, and begged their worships not to deal so hardly with a poor man whose offence, if offence it

were, had been quite involuntary. All was of no avail, and, in spite of his remonstrances and protestations of innocence, Job Spurling was forcibly dragged off by the cruel myrmidons of the law, and placed in the stocks, which stood in the broad part of the old High Street, hard by the great parish pump. Here, before long, people began to gather round to see who was the latest victim of the petty sessions, and how he bore his somewhat uncomfortable position. For to sit on the ground with both your feet made fast in the stocks is by no means a posture of comfort, nor one which a man would adopt by choice. Stiffness and cramp are pretty sure to come on, a bad cold (if the weather be not uncommonly bright and fine) is certain to follow, and rheumatism is but a natural consequence. To all this, however, poor Job was exposed, and, furthermore, to the jeers and jests of the rude boys who might fancy to torment him as a victim specially delivered over to their tender mercies.

Fortunately for the good carrier, he was not a man of a peculiarly sensitive nature, but yet he felt greatly the degradation to which he was exposed, and that none the less when he reflected how entirely it had been undeserved. Job was well known among the townspeople, and not a few of his acquaintances were among those who gazed upon him in his present disagreeable position. He had always been considered a man of quiet and sober habits, and great was the general surprise at finding him set in the common stocks. Opinions, indeed, were much divided upon the matter, some persons freely expressing their belief that Job Spurling had never done anything to

warrant such a punishment, whilst others, possessed with that feeling of reverence for the law and its administrators which is so widely diffused among Englishmen, were of opinion that the magistrates *must* know best, and that no man was ever set in the stocks unless he deserved it.

So the afternoon wore on, until Job had remained 'in durance vile' for more than one hour, and began to feel decidedly uncomfortable. A very unpleasant cramp had taken hold of his outstretched legs, to draw up and bend which he would at that moment have given half his worldly possessions; his back ached, his whole body felt cold and wretched, and he heartily wished that all the milestones, finger-posts, and witches in the world were at Jericho, and would have been quite content that the magistrates should go there too. This thought presently changed to another as the cramp grew worse, and time seemed to pass more slowly than he had ever remembered it to have done before. Why was he there at all? What a burning shame it was to have treated him thus! Of witches and warlocks he had ever had a proper horror, and now, here he was, set in the stocks for consorting with them. Could it be right? Had he really been guilty of any crime, or were the magistrates a set of prejudiced fools, who had put him where he was without rhyme or reason? This irreverent idea was quickly followed by another. If there were—as he had now no reason to doubt—such things as witches, and if he was to be punished for consorting with them, he might as well do so really, and endeavour by this means to keep clear of those

laws which seemed only able to catch and punish the innocent. This thought gradually grew upon him—and so did the cramp—until, after he had been in the stocks about half his appointed time, the pain and discomfort became unendurable.

About this time, some twenty or thirty people were lounging about in front of the stocks and around the old pump, and ever and anon some one or other of them would come and make an observation to the prisoner. The boys were less rude than you might have expected, and the general feeling seemed one of pity towards Job, but this in itself was somewhat trying to him. There are many people, and Job Spurling was one of them, who hate being pitied, and to whom the expressions 'Poor fellow,' 'How sorry I am,' 'How you *must* be suffering,' and words of similar import, are decidedly obnoxious. And when certain individuals of Job's acquaintance accosted him after this fashion, it annoyed him very little less than the actual bodily suffering which he was undergoing. At last, however, as it was getting on towards two o'clock, one from among the crowd came up very near to the victim of the law, and stood looking upon him with a peculiar glance. It was a respectably-attired country-woman, somewhat above the middle height, with a large basket upon her arm and a gray cloak over her shoulders. She had apparently come in from the country for shopping purposes, and casually strolled up to see what occasioned the gathering around the stocks. But as she looked upon Job Spurling, there was a keen flash in her eye and a curious expression about her whole face, which caused a strange feeling

within his breast and a kind of shudder to pass through his whole frame.

He was very sure he had seen those eyes before, and although his ideas were at that moment somewhat confused by the pain and discomfort of his position, he knew well enough that it was no ordinary woman who stood before him. She spoke not for a few moments, and, when she did so, it was not to Job, but to the bystanders.

‘Deary me!’ she said. ‘To think of an honest, sober man like Mr. Spurling being set in the stocks for nothing, and never a one of his friends to help him!’

‘What mean you, my good woman?’ remarked one of the bystanders, a burly grocer, who had come out to see his old acquaintance fast by the feet, and was rather touched by the words he heard. ‘What mean you? The worshipful justices have ordered this punishment, so it must needs be right.’

‘Worshipful blockheads!’ returned the country-woman boldly. ‘What has poor Job ever done to hurt man, woman, or child? Where will you find a more civil man or a better neighbour? Where is there a more safe and punctual carrier? There was a day when Ashford men would not have seen such an injustice committed. Alas! alas! Men are not what they used to be, methinks. Drat the justices!’

As she pronounced these dreadful words, no less a person than the head constable of the town appeared upon the scene and overheard her speech, subversive as it was of all social order and discipline. ‘What!’ he exclaimed, at once in a tone of authority. ‘Have

we here malapert and wicked persons who despise the law? Woman, the magistrates will deal with thee speedily for this !'

Now the constable in those days, being the beadle to wit, was an important person, and one so distinguished by his dress that little boys fled quickly before him, and thieves could recognise him a long way off, and so have a fair chance of escaping. Stripes of gold braid were upon his coat and a species of cocked hat upon his head, and, moreover, he carried a wand of office before which malefactors were bound to tremble. So when he spoke thus, and walked up with a stately step towards the countrywoman, as if about immediately to arrest her, everybody looked round, and the crowd began rapidly to increase. But the woman appeared in no manner or degree disconcerted by the concluding words of his address or the general dignity of his appearance. On the contrary, she faced him boldly, and in a louder voice repeated her own last words, 'Drat the magistrates !' looking him at the same time directly in the face.

A shudder ran through the surrounding crowd as they witnessed this daring and most unusual defiance of authority. But the officer of the law was equal to the emergency. Putting on his most terrible aspect, and swelling with dignity like a turkey-cock, he strode up to the bold offender, and, placing his hand on her shoulder, pronounced the awful words, 'I arrest thee in the name of the law !'

Strange to relate, this proceeding on the part of the great official appeared by no means to disconcert the person against whom it was taken.

'Hoity-toity!' she cried in great disdain. 'Are these your manners, Mr. Constable? What, first set an innocent man in the stocks, and then lay hands on a poor woman who has the courage to tell the truth about the matter! Why, what are the men of Ashford about, to suffer such things? Oh for an hour of bold Jack Cade back again! Are there no Cades left in Ashford now? Out upon ye, men, that are not worthy of the name!'

As she spoke, a low murmur of approval ran through the crowd, who, like most English crowds, had a keen sense of injustice committed, and a strong sympathy with those who had been its object. This naturally irritated the constable all the more, and he rudely grasped the shoulder of the countrywoman upon which he had laid his hand, as he spoke more loudly than before: 'I arrest thee, woman, in the name of the law. Come thou with me!'

But a totally different result followed from that which the proud official had anticipated. Shaking herself suddenly free from his grasp, the woman raised her basket, and with an exclamation of '*that* for thee and the law too!' hit her adversary right in the face. He staggered backwards under the blow, and at that very moment someone in the crowd, less respectful of authority, or more daring than the rest, perpetrated the enormity of tripping him up, so that he sat suddenly down in a puddle of half-melted snow and mud which was immediately behind him. A spirit of mischief seemed suddenly to have possessed the crowd. No sooner was the unlucky constable down than someone twitched off his cocked



hat, another stumbled up against him so as to lay him flat upon his back, and in another moment the crowd was thronging about and over him, and all was noise and confusion.

But amongst and above the tumult a voice was distinctly heard (though no one could exactly say from whom it proceeded) uttering a cry of 'Down with the stocks! Set the prisoner free!' The words and the idea ran like lightning through the rapidly increasing crowd, and without more ado they hastened to act upon the suggestion. In a very few moments such a shower of blows was directed upon the framework of the stocks as put Job Spurling's limbs in considerable peril of fracture, and such indeed might have been the actual result but for the promptitude of the countrywoman who had been the first to propose his rescue. Taking advantage of the overthrow of the constable, she had cleverly drawn the key of the stocks from his girdle, and with this she proceeded to set Job free before his would-be friends had time to injure him, as they would otherwise probably have done.

Hardly able to stand upright from cramp and stiffness, Job staggered to his feet, and would certainly have fallen but for the arm of the woman, who supported him for the first moment, whilst she took the opportunity of whispering in his ear: 'Keep close to me, Gaffer Spurling, and thou shalt be safe—otherwise the servants of the law will nab thee again shortly.'

Too confused to do anything but obey, Job kept as near as he could to the woman, who threaded her

way through the crowd, now so busily engaged in attempting to pull the stocks to pieces that they almost forgot the object with which they had begun the attack. Still, there were some who remembered it, and were apparently determined to give Job and his preserver all the benefits of popular applause. Several of them left their attack upon the stocks, and cried aloud that they would carry Job through the streets in triumph, and defy those who had so unjustly imprisoned him. This would certainly have proved fatal to the carrier's chance of escape, since it would have attracted general attention to him, and it could not be long before the authorities would appear in greater force, to preserve order in the town, in which case he would undoubtedly be recaptured. The crowd, however, seemed bent upon their plan, and all the more so because the stocks, being strongly built, resisted the attacks of their weaponless hands.

Fortunately, however, there occurred at this instant an incident than which nothing could have been more propitious for the worthy carrier. Round the corner, right upon the crowd, came the Chairman of the Bench, Mr. Splutterbuck himself, unattended, but foaming with fury at what he saw before him. 'You rascals! You rascallions! You vile scum of the earth!' he roared out as soon as he saw what was going on. 'I'll commit you all! I'll send every man Jack of you to gaol for a twelvemonth! I'll—'

Just at this moment, in a loud, clear whisper, the countrywoman whispered to those immediately around her: "'Twere a goodly jest to put him in the stocks

himself, and give him a taste of the punishment he so loves to give others.'

The words ran like wildfire through the crowd. Ripe for mischief as they were, and already excited by the lengths to which they had gone, they were just in the very humour to go a little further. So, just in the middle of his raging and storming, Squire Splutterbuck found himself suddenly seized from behind, and carried, in spite of all his struggles, to the stocks from which Job Spurling had just been set free. There he was compelled to take his seat, and amid shouts of laughter from the bystanders, the worthy magistrate was made as fast in the stocks as ever had been prisoner by his orders.

His indignation and wrath may be more easily imagined than described. Scarcely able to speak for rage, he broke out into incoherent exclamations of 'You villains! you thieves! you drunkards! you murderers!' and then, as if to apply an epithet of culminating comprehensiveness, 'You poachers!' he roared, at the top of his voice, in an ungovernable fury of passion.

Meanwhile, Job Spurling's companion was not slow in taking advantage of the opportunity which she had so cleverly created. Quietly 'creeping off behind the crowd, she dived down a little alley which led away from the High Street, and encouraging Job to shake off his stiffness and follow her as well as he could, moved on at a fair pace, and crossed the High Street again at a good distance from the crowd, and just behind a body of constables whom the sagacity of Mr. Wilyman had collected on the first tidings of the tumult, and who were hastily rushing to the scene of

action, where they doubtless rescued the worshipful justice and made an example of his persecutors before long.

Our story, however, is not concerned to follow the fortunes of these good people, but rather those of our hero and his rescuer, who proceeded by bye-streets and alleys until they found themselves outside the town, and free from any chance of pursuit. Here Job's companion stopped, and, to say the truth, it was no unpleasant time or place which she had chosen for the purpose. It was by this time between half-past two and three o'clock; the sun was shining brightly and the afternoon was cheerful, whilst the view was by no means dreary or unpleasant. Immediately in front of the pair lay the famous Potter's Corner woods, about a mile and a quarter distant from the spot upon which they stood. Upon their left was the turnpike road along which Job had come at such a headlong pace, upon the eventful night which first introduced him to our notice. Then, at some distance on the right, and stretching far away behind, lay the backbone of Kent; Eastwell Park, with its grand trees and spacious woods adorning that side of the hill upon which they looked, whilst between them and the park came the undulating plains of Eastwell and Westwell, a right pleasant country to gaze upon as you came out of old Ashford, and turned your back upon the town.

'Hurrah! Gaffer Job!' cried his companion. 'Once more art thou a free man, and by whose help, think ye?'

Job looked first up and then down, to his right hand and to his left, and rubbed his eyes in strange

bewilderment. His head felt giddy and confused, so that he hardly knew whether he was asleep or awake. There, however, he undoubtedly stood, a free man, sure enough; and as undoubtedly it had been mainly, if not wholly, owing to the efforts of the person beside him that he had been delivered from his foes. Who, then, or what was she? Whence her interest in his welfare? Job, as has been before hinted, was a widower, and consequently somewhat suspicious of the advances and proffered friendships of ladies of a certain age. Here, however, had been an act of generous and disinterested friendship performed by one who had bravely risked her own safety in his behalf, and had shown an amount of courage in its execution which excited the admiration as well as the gratitude of the individual who had been its object. Job thought over the matter as deeply as he was capable of doing at the moment, but could hit upon none of his friends or acquaintances who was at all likely to have acted as the courageous countrywoman had done.

The latter waited a short time for an answer to her question, regarding Job steadily all the while, but with an amused expression upon her countenance. Then, she lifted her hand and hit him a friendly blow on the back, as she exclaimed, 'Think again, Job! Is there no one who was interested in thy defence? For whom didst thou suffer? What act of kindness was rewarded by the just magistrates with the stocks? And what didst thou wish and determine just before I came up to aid thee?'

As she spoke, Job staggered back aghast, as a new light suddenly broke in upon him. He had suffered

on account of the witch ; he had carried her, though unknowingly, in his cart from Charing to Hothfield Heath, and immediately before the countrywoman had commenced her efforts for his release, he had been wishing and determining to consort in reality with those beings, his reputed connection with whom had brought him into such trouble. Putting two and two together, the inference was sufficiently obvious. The witch herself had come to his aid, and his companion and rescuer was none other than the Crone of Charing!

As I said, Job staggered back aghast as this conviction flashed across his mind, and, for a moment or two, he could find no voice wherewith to speak. This, however, seemed by no means to disconcert his companion, who laughed lightly as she remarked, 'I could never have helped thee, good Job, but for that wise wish. We be poor persecuted beings, we who belong to the Wise Sisterhood, but we have power to help those who seek us, and who wish to be our friends, and here is the first proof thereof, that thou art standing here a free man, and thy foe hath taken thy place. Goose's eggs and livers ! to think of the red-faced old justice stuck there in the stocks like a common thief ! Ha ! ha ! ha !' and she laughed a shrill laugh as she spoke.

By this time Job had somewhat recovered from his first amazement and affright, and as he thought of the ridiculous spectacle of Squire Splutterbuck set in the stocks by the Ashford mob, he could not help joining in the witch's laugh. This was exactly what she desired, and accordingly continued to enlarge upon

what had just occurred as a capital joke, and gradually made Job feel more at home with her, and less fearful of the company in which he had so unexpectedly found himself. Still, he experienced an uneasy sensation within his breast, which he could not entirely overcome. What was to be done next, and where was this all to end? His dwelling was at Maidstone, though he constantly slept at Ashford, and his journeys between the two were somewhat irregularly made. But to appear again in the town of Ashford would be like walking into the jaws of the lion, after that day's adventures. Yet Sultan and the cart were there, and without them his means of gaining a livelihood were gone. Could the witch rescue these for him, or would she provide him with another and easier way of living? These were questions which the carrier could not help asking himself, and was unable to supply any satisfactory answer.

'Come,' said the Crone, presently, 'we have rested long enough, and must be starting on our way now.'

'But whither, Dame, I pray thee?' asked Job in a tremulous tone. 'My horse and cart are in Ashford, and my home at Maidstone; whither would'st thou that I should wend my way with thee?'

'Trouble not for that,' returned she whom he addressed; 'go back to Ashford an' thou pleasest, and take worthy Justice Splutterbuck's place in the stocks again. 'Twas cold, was it not, this afternoon? Perchance 'twill be colder as night comes on, and I'll warrant me the constables will keep you there the livelong night if they catch their escaped hare again! As for Maidstone, how long will it take thee to walk

the four and twenty miles that lie betwixt here and there? Marry come up, friend Job, thou hast nought for it but to come with me to the merry woods of Longbeach, and keep holiday until times be better and men less foolish than now !'

So saying, she tucked her arm within that of Job, leered up into his face in the most fascinating manner which she could command, and pulled him along with her as she started off again. Sorely perplexed and doubtful as to the best course to pursue, Job saw nothing for it but to go with her for the nonce. Back he could not go without the greatest risk of loss of liberty. Maidstone, as the Crone had observed, was too far for a walk that afternoon, and there was no available shelter near at hand. Besides all this, however disreputable and wicked his companion might be, she had certainly done him an uncommonly good turn, and from very gratitude he could hardly desert her when she so anxiously desired his company. So he went along with her, though not without reluctance, and, avoiding the turnpike road, they struck into a footpath which led to Westwell, and walked forward at a good pace.

As they went, the Crone of Charing was by no means silent, which, indeed, is rarely the fault of her sex, unless under peculiar circumstances. She rallied Job upon his recent adventures and present apparent despondency, described to him the free and jovial life which those led who had sufficient courage to defy the law and its servants, and hinted at the times of ease and enjoyment which might be before him if he would but be guided by her advice. Emboldened by the



cheerfulness of the dame and the lively nature of her conversation, the carrier took heart, and presently ventured to ask her the reason why she had acted in such a strange manner upon the occasion when they last met, in the matter of her violent attack upon the hag of Hothfield Heath. Not that Job described the latter personage by such a title, but alluded to 'that woman as we met on the Heath, alongside of the milestone,' which was a form of words not calculated to give offence to anyone.

At this question, the countenance of the Crone of Charing changed visibly, and a glance of malignant ferocity shot from her eyes. 'Trouble not thou with such matters, gossip Job,' she replied; 'the creature whom thou namest is a miserable hag who opposes me in many things, and would fain assume a greater authority in this district than mine. But she shan't—never!' and the speaker gnashed her teeth as she uttered the words.

At this time they were approaching the parish of Westwell, where, amongst, or rather away from, other people, dwelt a remarkable hermit. This individual was not unlike many who have lived both before and after his time. He loved rural pursuits, was devoted to flowers and bees, and found the chief comfort in his religion to consist in a conscientious belief that everyone who differed from him was decidedly wrong and on the high road to ruin. Still, there were many who believed him to be a man of remarkable sanctity, and respected him accordingly. Now in the course which Job and his companion were taking, they must perforce pass very close to the garden of this holy

man, and, as luck would have it, at the moment they did so, he stood in the corner of his garden, looking over a low hedge, and perceived the two persons approaching. Nearer and nearer they came, and when they were but a few yards from him, the hermit recognised Job Spurling, whom he knew by sight, and, by some mysterious talent or other, felt well assured that his companion was not the simple country-woman she appeared.

Being, unlike many of his class, a man given to conversation with his fellow-men, and not less so with his fellow-women, the holy man at once hailed the advancing pair with 'Good morrow, my friends! Whither wend ye your way this fine afternoon?'

To this Job, not being well assured of the end of his journey, could make no immediate reply, but his companion was more ready with her tongue. 'Home, sir, an't please ye,' she said, dropping a rude curtsey as she spoke.

'But where is home, good woman?' returned the other. 'I wist not, Spurling, that thou wast again married, or that I had thee for a neighbour.'

'Tis not my wife,' replied Job, somewhat crossly, not considering the remark necessary; whilst the woman, taking up the conversation just as the hermit asked, 'Who, then, may this be?' said in a meek voice, 'Only Mr. Spurling, sir, was a seeing of me home, like, afore he went home hisself. Betsey Claris, of Westwell Leacon, at your service.'

'Tis false!' suddenly shouted the hermit at these words. 'Betsey Claris has left Westwell Leacon these three months, and thou art no more Betsey Claris

than I am! Evil one, I know thee! thou art the Crone of Charing! Avaunt, child of the demon!' As he spoke, the holy man raised himself to his full height, stretched forth his hands, made certain signs which he deemed to be efficacious, and began to utter words which he doubtless intended should have an immediate and paralysing effect upon the person to whom they were addressed.

She, however, regarded him with the most perfect indifference, and merely remarking, 'You are a very uncivil old man, and would do well to curse less and wash more,' proceeded on her way, having addressed him in words singularly applicable to the great majority of his profession.

The hermit continued to rage and fume, but the two travellers calmly pursued their way, although Job was lost in astonishment at the small effect which the words and gestures of the holy man appeared to have produced.

Seeing him thus awe-struck and silent, the Crone deemed it necessary to encourage him, and, by way of doing so, observed, 'Thou seest, comrade Job, that we of the magic sisterhood are not so easily overthrown!'

'I don't understand—I don't rightly understand it,' quoth he in reply. 'The man is said to be a holy man, and assuredly he used good words.'

'That may be,' returned his companion, 'and truly it pained me to hear them, but nathless such as he have no power over us. He is a man over-fond of condemning those who have not the luck to agree with him, and so that utter lack of charity balanceth

that faith of his so well, that he is but a weakling after all when he comes against us. No, no, Job, 'tis not such as the self-righteous hermit that we have to fear! But enough of this subject, for it likes me not!'

So saying, she strode forward, and passing through Westwell, began to ascend the hill, bearing on in the direction of the Longbeach Woods. It was now getting on for four o'clock, and Job began to feel rather uncomfortable in several respects. In the first place he was hungry, in the second place he was thirsty, in the third place he had had nearly enough walking for one day, and in the fourth place he was by no means satisfied as to the place to which he was going or the companion with whom he travelled. Still, he went on some way, until he found that they were actually on the hill above Charing, and he could see the smoke of the little town below.

'Dame,' said he, after pausing for a moment to take breath, 'we are safe enough now from pursuit; would it not be well that I should seek bed and lodging in Charing, and trespass no longer on thy kindness?'

'What's that, Gaffer Spurling?' answered the Crone, sharply. 'Wouldst accept our services and then run away from us after such a fashion? No, no! He that seeks to consort with our sisterhood must do so for good and all. No running away and no drawing back from the path upon which thou hast entered. Bethink thee, friend Job, thou hast used our power to free thee from thy foes, thou hast joined in discomfiting the holy hermit of Westwell, and shouldst thou

wish to draw back now, thy friends would disown thee and thy foes destroy thee to a certainty. Take heart, man ; be of good courage, cheer up, and come along with me. Thou shalt live as thou hast never lived before, and triumph merrily over all thy foes !'

Thus saying, she slapped Job heartily on the back, and urged him to approach with her the shades of Longbeach. With a heavy heart and troubled spirit, the carrier obeyed her behests : he felt that there was but too much truth in what she said, and that it was more than doubtful whether he could ever re-enter the circle of friends which he had just quitted, now that he had been really contaminated by contact with the witches and seen in actual alliance with the noted Crone of Charing. The latter, meanwhile, rallied him gaily upon his downcast air and want of spirit.

'Cheer up, man,' she cried, in as pleasant a tone as she could call to her aid ; 'cheer up, and be of a good heart. You are going to lead a jovial and merry life now : no more cold, dreary journeys from Maidstone to Ashford across that bleak country ; no more dull and lonely evenings—ay' (and here she winked with a knowing leer at Job), 'and no more settings in the stocks, my man ! No, no ! *those* days are over. Oh ! the jolly days we will have together in the old woods of Longbeach ! No justices and justices' clerks there, Gaffer Spurling ! Come, cheer up and be jolly !'

Thus addressed, Job hardly knew what to say in reply, and accordingly very wisely said nothing. No doubt, thought he, it was all very jolly for the witch

to have caught a new recruit, and very well for her to encourage him with fair words, but for all that he felt anything but easy in his mind. His companion, however, continued to cheer him up as they advanced, and pretended to think that his silence only proceeded from weariness or hunger, or perchance a little of both.

'Surely,' said she, 'we have walked a good distance, friend Job, and those limbs of thine must doubtless ache yet from their experience of the Ashford stocks; nevertheless, 'tis better to have had the walk than to have stayed in limbo. And as for hunger! there is food before us, Master Spurling, food in plenty—quantity and quality both—and good drink to wash it down. Keep up thy spirits, man, for thou hast taken a wise as well as a bold step, and wilt soon find that thou hast nought to regret.'

She said a great deal more which it is unnecessary to repeat, and evidently sought to make herself agreeable to the worthy carrier, and to drive from his mind those doubts and fears which (as none knew better than she did) could not fail to be present to anyone in the circumstances and condition of her companion. But, sooth to say, all her words and blandishments produced but little effect. As they approached nearer and nearer to the great wood, Job began to feel less and less comfortable at the uncertainty of the prospect before him. He had not, as he thought, been a particularly wicked man during the fifty years which he had passed in the world; that is to say, he had been sober, steady at his work, obedient to the laws,

honest and punctual as a carrier, and by no means given to evil and loose company. It seemed somewhat hard, therefore, that just as the evening of his life, so to speak, had commenced, he should have fallen into such dangerous society, and should be led, whether he would or no, to join those witches and warlocks whom he, in common with most other men of his class, had hitherto always regarded with the most intense fear and aversion. It seemed, however, that he had no choice in the matter, and, as far as he could see, there was nothing for it but to submit himself to his fate. One more effort he resolved to make, but how or when to make it was a point which Job turned over in his mind again and again before he could determine, and perhaps would never have done so, had it not been determined for him.

They had now entered the wood, and the sun being nearly tired of shining, and feeling that he had done his work well for the day, only dimly lighted the wood-track along which the Crone of Charing led the way. All of a sudden, a low musical sound, as of the very sweetest melody, rose on the light breeze which fluttered through the trees, and died away in soft and delicious cadence. Job's companion started at the sound, and shuddered visibly.

'What is it, dame? what is it?' eagerly demanded the carrier. For a moment the witch replied not, but instead thereof groaned deeply, as if in pain. Once again the sweet, plaintive sound arose, this time evidently nearer than before, and once again it died away in the same manner. A pleasant, soothing sound it was as it fell upon Job's ears, and in that

one moment his thoughts flew back to his childish days, his mother's love and tender teaching, her sweet singing to him of hymns on the Sunday evenings at home, and her talk of heaven and the beautiful angels with their golden wings and sweet-toned voices ever raised in praise of the Most High. All flashed across Job's mind in an instant of time, though it was long since his mother had passed away from earth, long since he had been taught such things, or indeed thought of them at all. In the same instant he be-thought him how different from his mother was the woman who stood beside him, and how grieved would that mother be if she could see him in such company. The thought was yet in his heart, when a low moan from his companion attracted his attention, and the next moment he perceived a figure slowly advancing towards them.

'Tis she ! 'tis she !' muttered the witch in a tone of unutterable woe ; 'the Lady of Calehill !'

Job started. He had not lived so long in that country without having heard the legend of the Lady of Calehill. A daughter of the old family who had so long held that ancient seat, she had been reputed as pious as she was beautiful, and had at an early age entered a nunnery. What exactly followed was not accurately known to the common folk, but she was believed to have died young, and her spirit was said to haunt the neighbourhood, and especially the great Longbeach Woods. More than once, when witches or warlocks had been about to perpetrate some deed more than usually nefarious, 'the Lady of Calehill' was said to have interfered, and her name was held



in profound love and estimation among the simple peasantry. This, then, was the being who now approached Job and his trembling companion, and presently stood within a few paces of them. She was apparently dressed entirely in white, and the instrument from which had proceeded the sweet strains aforementioned was held in her left hand, over which hung some kind of light drapery flung gracefully across it. She slowly waved her right arm as she looked upon Job Spurling and his companion, and then, in a low, sweet voice, uttered the following words :—

‘Wouldst drag thy victim, evil crone,  
To guilt and sorrow like thine own ?  
Light shine upon his eyes and heart  
And let him see thee as thou art !’

As this strange Being spoke, it was to Job Spurling as if scales had suddenly fallen from his eyes. Instead of a comfortable, well-to-do country woman, such as his companion had hitherto appeared to be, he saw in her a gaunt, skinny, hideous old creature, with cruel, glaring, ever-restless eyes, and an expression of constant pain and misery upon her countenance. Just as many a man ere now has found sin pleasant and attractive for a time, and has then been made aware how hollow and unsubstantial are its pleasures, and what sorrow it is sure to bring upon him in the end, so all that was comely and agreeable in the old witch passed away in a moment, and Job saw her as she really was, ugly, repulsive, and wretched altogether. At the same moment, the Lady of Calehill spoke again, and this time she addressed herself to the astonished

carrier, who stood trembling and awe-stricken before her : —

‘Hence, mortal ! while as yet you may,  
From Longbeach quickly haste away,  
And, free from mesh of witch’s net,  
Henceforth this lesson ne’er forget—  
Who keeps bad company is lost,  
Sin’s pleasures ne’er are worth the cost !’

Job heard and understood well enough the words of the lady, nor was he slow to act upon the suggestion which they contained. There was no reason why he should any longer stay where he was, and he now knew so well that the crone had only rescued him in order to make him her slave, and reduce him to the same state of sin and misery as herself, that any further gratitude towards her for his release appeared wholly unnecessary. Animated, therefore, with that desire of self-preservation which is said to be the first law of nature, the honest carrier turned round, and fairly took to his heels. As soon as he found himself outside the wood, he made the best of his way into Charing, and went straight to the same inn where his encounter with old Chambers had taken place. Here he speedily obtained refreshments, of which he stood much in need, and imparted to the landlord the whole of his strange story. Mine host listened to him with great attention, and firmly believed every word ; for, living in that neighbourhood, he had heard something before both of the Crone of Charing and the Lady of Calehill. He told Job, however, that there would certainly be many unbelievers, and that, if the story got abroad, it would very likely lead him back to those stocks from which he had so recently escaped. ‘For,’ said he, ‘so

perverse and wicked is the mind of man, and so set against us poor publicans are many of the present day, that if anything out of the common happens to a man, they put it down immediately to drink, and this will they say of your adventures.'

Job felt the truth of this remark, and was very ready to have kept the story quiet. Unfortunately, however, his troubles would not be ended thus. His horse and cart were at Ashford; his home at Maidstone. Should he go to fetch the former, he would undoubtedly be arrested—should he return to the latter, he would be helpless without his Sultan and his cart, and only starvation would be before him. The worthy landlord, however, solved the difficulty for him by engaging to take the whole thing off his hands. He said that he knew of a man who would be glad to take the house and the business, and he himself would buy the horse and cart as a speculation.

Job was so anxious to get away altogether from a locality in which he felt sure he should always be in danger, that he readily closed with his friend's offer, pocketed the money which was offered for the horse and cart, and, after passing the night at the inn, started off very early next morning for Maidstone. As he went along the road he could not but observe that every mile-stone was in its place, and that as to the finger-posts, although many of them had a battered appearance, and looked somewhat old and dilapidated, yet no one who did not know the truth would have suspected that they had been roving over the country, or engaged in a battle with the mile-stones. Job went steadily on his way, and reached Maidstone without

further adventure. Indeed, I cannot tell more of the adventures which may have befallen him during the rest of his life, although I very much doubt whether he ever encountered one more extraordinary than that which I have related. He went, as his peasant neighbours expressed it, 'beyond London' and 'down in the sheers' (*Shires*), and, I believe, prospered exceedingly. But, as I have already hinted, I know no more about him, and can therefore tell nothing.

Of the other personages of our story I could indeed say much more. I could describe the fury of Squire Splutterbuck when he was released from the stocks, and the vengeance which he took upon all those who had been concerned in the outrage; I could tell you of the diligent, but utterly ineffectual, search for Job which was made by the local constables, and of the report which was spread that he had been seen seated on a broom-stick behind the witch, flying away over the town of Ashford. But all these things can be perfectly well imagined by those who care about them. I do not like to say anything further about the more mysterious personages of the story. For aught I know, the Crone of Charing and the Hag of Hothfield still hold their midnight revels and fight their midnight battles in their respective localities. But these are on one side of Ashford and I live on the other, and as witches could never cross the river Stour without much trouble, it has not been easy to learn particulars of those who lived on the other side of that famous stream. But of this I am very certain, that if there are still crones and hags in that district, there are good spirits such as the Lady of Calehill there too. For, although

evil is permitted to dwell upon the earth, and many there are who haste to follow it, yet to those who desire to lead pure and good and honest lives, help and aid are never wanting from the heavenly power to whom evil is abominable, and who will shield and guard His own who seek Him even more surely and effectually than the Lady of Calehill could protect and deliver worthy Job Spurling from the Crone of Charing!

*THE SQUIRREL AND THE HEDGEHOG.*

A MERRY little squirrel sat cracking nuts upon a high tree in Foreland Wood. He had been chasing one of his companions from tree to tree for some time, until they had both got tired of this fascinating amusement, and decided to try something else. So they ran down upon the ground and pursued each other there for a few yards. But this could be done equally well by rabbits, human beings, or other inferior animals; and so they both voted it unworthy of a squirrel to continue grovelling upon earth while the glorious tree-life of a nobler race was, if not exactly at his feet, certainly within his reach. So the two little animals curled their tails contemptuously over their backs upon the ground, chuckled with joyful pride as they looked up at the trees above them, and then running cheerfully up the nearest nut-tree, sat comfortably among the branches, one of them cracking nuts as if his life depended upon it, and the other looking at him with as much interest as if he had been engaged upon an entirely new experiment, instead of merely following one of the common, every-day occupations of an ordinary squirrel.

It was autumn, or late summer-time, as you may suppose from the circumstance of there being nuts to crack, for by the winter-time the nuts would all have been gathered and gone ; in the spring they would not have made their appearance, and in the earlier part of the summer they would not have been worthy of a respectable squirrel's attention. It was, as I have already remarked, late summer or early autumn time, and at this season of the year the woodlands are very lovely. The trees have still kept their full foliage, and afford shade from the rays of the sun to those who may require it. The huge canopy of leaves still gladdens and soothes the eye with its beautiful green hue, none the less soft and pleasant because it is just making up its mind to turn to yellow, before the leaves proceed to die off and fall before the winds which will soon sweep through the woods to prepare them for the coming of the colder season. But the winds have not yet become cold, and only rustle among the leaves without destroying them, softly sighing through the tops of the trees as if reminding them, in friendly yet sorrowful tones, of the unpleasant duty which they will shortly have to perform in stripping the branches of their green ornaments. At this time of year, no place is more delightful, no place more peaceful, no place more full of quiet soul-enjoyment than a wood. Everything speaks of rest, content, happiness. The wood-pigeon coos to her mate in soft, loving tones ; the bright-plumaged cock-pheasant, if you chance to come across him, stares at you with his proud eye, and struts away into the bushes with a self-reliant, inde-

pendent air which shows that as yet he knows nothing of the guns and dogs which will hereafter disturb his tranquillity ; the homely tap of the woodpecker has a cheerful sound with it, and even the chattering of the distant magpie and the lower note of the blue-winged jay speak of peace and security, and add to the feeling of bliss which pervades the breast of the wood-wanderer.

Such a time was it, then, when our squirrel sat cracking his nuts in the tree, and carelessly threw the shells down, little dreaming what important consequences were to result from this apparently trivial act. Immediately beneath the nut-tree reposed, in all the confidence afforded her by the time and place, a venerable hedgehog. Age had dimmed her eye and increased her size, but it had at the same time lengthened her bristles and by no means improved her temper, which, to tell the truth, had never been one of the best. She had been the mother of many children, the great majority of whom had turned out badly or come to an untimely end. Some had been worried by dogs ; some, surprised by cruel keepers, had vainly curled themselves up into a prickly and apparently impenetrable ball, but, opening beneath the cruel pressure of the foot of man, had died miserably and literally crushed beneath the iron heel of human despotism. Other deaths, too, had befallen other members of the old hedgehog's family. Hurlled by thoughtless boys into ponds or lakes, some had been made to swim until they sank exhausted beneath the water ; some had trodden unwarily upon traps set for game-destroying animals, and, after suffering agonies



from the cruel fangs which held their lacerated legs, had not only been put summarily to death by the trap-setters, but their very fate adduced as a proof of the mischievous propensities of their unhappy race in connection with game; a disputed point which has never yet been satisfactorily settled so as to convince everybody. These, and other misfortunes too numerous to be mentioned, had soured the disposition and blighted the life of the ancient hedgehog of whom we speak.

No doubt this ought not to have been the case. Chastened by sorrow and softened by affliction, she ought to have improved in temperament and character, to have regarded others more kindly than before, and to have devoted her life to good and charitable actions. I regret to say that this had not hitherto been the case. Without entering into any details concerning the life and character of the venerable dame, who, after all, was perhaps no worse than others have been before and will be again, it must be owned that she had not displayed any of those charming qualities or performed any of those blessed deeds which would have proved to the world that she had gathered good and wholesome fruit from the tree of adversity. She was peevish, discontented, ill-natured, and decidedly selfish. If she could have become a witch or a bad fairy, she would doubtless have played the part to perfection, but as these positions are unattainable by creatures of the hedgehog race, she was obliged to content herself by being generally disagreeable to all other hedgehogs whom she chanced to encounter, and by bullying and injuring any smaller or weaker

animals who were unlucky enough to come in her way. Add to this that, to anyone who would listen to her, she had an inveterate habit of grumbling at her own state of health and sad condition, finding fault with everything and everybody else, and saying any evil which she could invent against anybody whom she did not happen to like, and you have before you the picture of a person about as disagreeable and troublesome as any who ever yet set foot upon this pleasant world of ours.

Most unlucky, therefore, was it that whilst our squirrel was cracking and eating his nuts, and throwing down the shells, one of these latter should have alighted precisely upon the tip of the upturned snout of the old hedgehog, at the very moment when, filled with discontent and envy of the world in general, she was indulging in a wide yawn. It was a rather large nutshell, it had been somewhat jagged by the squirrel's teeth when he cracked the nut, it fell from a good height, and the rough side struck the snout. These things combined made the blow sufficient to startle, and for the moment to sting, bodily as well as mentally, the ancient dame. For an instant she could not tell what had happened, or whence the blow had come. But having been brought up in the country, and having passed most of her life in woods, she was well acquainted with the nature and customs of the animals who habitually frequent such localities. It was not long, therefore, before she suspected whence came the blow, and more especially when, on closer inspection, she perceived that it had been inflicted by a nutshell. Looking up into the tree, her sight,

although not so good as had once been the case, was sufficiently clear to allow her to discern the squirrel and to note his occupation. Although it was long since she had learned her multiplication table, she was yet well enough able to put two and two together, and immediately came to the conclusion not only that the animal above her had thrown down the nutshell which had struck her, but that he had done so wilfully and maliciously, solely and with the full intent to annoy and insult her. Looking up, therefore, with a baleful glare in her eye, and giving vent to an unmusical grunt of indignation and ill-temper, she snarled out at her persecutor (as she at once imagined him to be), the words, in themselves unobjectionable, 'What did you do *that* for?'

I said it was unlucky that the nutshell had struck the old lady's snout. Still more unlucky, if possible, was it that the squirrel happened to be in a merry, thoughtless humour, and was by no means sensible of the dire affront which he had put upon the person who addressed him. So when he saw her look up and speak after this fashion, instead of showing such sorrow and contrition as might have condoned his offence and induced the injured creature to forgive him, he positively lost all sense of propriety so far as to burst out laughing in her face. This, as may easily be imagined, had a tendency to increase rather than to pacify the rising wrath of the other. Nor, indeed, was this unseemly fit of laughter the full extent of the squirrel's misbehaviour, for as soon as he had indulged therein sufficiently, he addressed the offended dame as follows: 'What, is that you, grand-

mamma hedgepig? And did the nutty-tutty hit her nose-ey-posey? Poor old girl!' And with these words he gave vent to another fit of laughter more insulting than the first.

By this time the old hedgehog had become very angry, and it was not only the manner of the squirrel, but his words themselves, which roused her to passion. A hedgehog *is* a hedgehog, no doubt, as is well known to every student of natural history, but that with which the world is not so well acquainted is the fact that among the upper class of hedgehogs the term hedgepig is considered one of reproach, and is only applied to inferior animals of their race. To be called, then, by this title, to be further accosted as the 'grandmamma' of an animal to whom she was in no way whatever related, and beyond and above all, to be designated an 'old girl' by the impertinent creature, made up altogether such a condensed insult as to be totally unbearable by the person to whom it was addressed.

Bristling with rage, she looked upward at her tormentor, and upbraided him in the following terms: 'You impudent jackanapes! You nut-cracking, tail-whisking, tree-crawling vagabond! How dare you speak to me in that way, and treat me as if you were my equal? I'll ——' But before she could get any further, the squirrel, who liked abuse no better than his neighbours, deliberately let another nut drop upon her head, which it merely grazed, it is true, but none the less mightily increased her fury. 'Is she hurt, old lady?' jeered he at the same time; 'get some ointment and rub it well in, or put your head in a bag at once, but don't be cross, grandmamma.'

At this act and the words which followed, the old hedgehog nearly exploded with rage, and immediately began to use indiscriminately all the longest words she knew by way of abusing her antagonist. 'Oh, you perpendicular, arithmetical artichoke!' she shrieked out. 'You inflated, inflammable alliteration! You antediluvian, abominable antimacassar!' And with such-like extraordinary expletives she abjured her enemy and all his kindred. The squirrel, meanwhile, growing angry at this continued abuse, retorted after his own fashion by throwing down nutshells and bits of stick, which were anything but agreeable to the polite old dame, who found that, unless the conditions of the combat could be changed, she would rather decidedly get the worst of it. She therefore began slowly to scuttle away from the neighbourhood of the tree in which the squirrel had ensconced himself, but as she did so she declared war against her enemy in the most solemn manner known to animals of her race. First she made an awful face at him; then she bristled vehemently, and shook herself with an energy surprising in one of her advanced years; then she rolled herself up into a compact ball, and in that position uttered a direful threat against all squirrels. She wished that they might be shot, trapped, choked with nuts, skinned, pecked to death by hawks, stung to death by bees, teased, worried, harassed and annoyed by all the other woodland animals, and finally extirpated by common consent. She warned this individual squirrel that from that hour she and her friends were foes to him and his, and that vengeance, dire and swift, would follow the insult which he had dared

to offer to one whom in his coward heart he had deemed unprotected and defenceless.

Having said this, and added many stronger expressions which I forbear to repeat, the old hedgehog went her way in search of allies by whose aid to attack and overthrow her enemies. She sought first the jackdaws, knowing them well for a mischievous tribe, and ever ready to do anything for gain. The crafty old dame was not long in tempting the birds by offers of various articles, which, during a long life of thrift and stinginess, she had accumulated in various hiding-places in that wood. Moreover, she entered into a solemn bond and covenant with the jackdaws that, if they satisfactorily performed her behests and accomplished her designs against her enemies, she on her part would engage to render them great and important services after the young tame pheasants had been hatched, by overturning in the night the hen-coops in which they were located with their foster-mother hens, so as to enable the hovering jackdaws to make an easy prey of them in the early morn. When she had gained over the black-coated throng of winged chatterers by bribes and promises, she instructed them fully as to the work they were to do to earn the rewards held out to them. They were to come forth in strong detachments from Bockhanger and Barracks Woods, their two strongholds, fly over to Foreland, and search it thoroughly until they had discovered all the squirrels' drays which might be there. Having done this, they were to watch until the squirrels should be out nutting, and then a sufficient force of birds being told off

to each dray, should pull it entirely to pieces, scattering every stick upon the ground, and leaving the squirrels in the wood without shelter for their heads. Should there be young squirrels in the drays, so much the better ; if very small they might be killed by the fall from their destroyed homes, or if too big for such a fate, a few well-directed pecks from the beaks of the jackdaws would settle matters for them equally well. Thus, at one fell blow, the homes of all the squirrels in the wood would be destroyed, and their very existence threatened without their knowing of the attack or having sufficient time to repel it. The jackdaws were very willing to undertake the task appointed them by the old hedgehog, and she chuckled to herself with cruel satisfaction as she thought of its probable success.

Meanwhile, the squirrel, to whom his squabble with the irate dame had been the affair of a moment, soon forgotten by the gay young fellow in his merry gambols with his mates, little dreamed of the envenomed enmity which he had aroused in the breast of his foe, or of the terrible consequences which were about to follow. Far from making any preparations for war, he went on just as if all around him was profoundly peaceful, as indeed was the case to all outward appearance. He arose early as usual, cracked his nuts and his jokes at intervals during the days, sunned himself on the most convenient trees, chased his companions up and down, and retired comfortably to his dray as the nights closed in. For several days this state of things continued, as it had taken that time for the old hedgehog to make her arrangements. Then,

one fine day, the blow was suddenly struck. Fifteen pairs of squirrels, who had lived in listless security within and around Foreland Wood, found themselves suddenly either childless, drayless, or both. As near as can be ascertained from the official returns, the actual number of young squirrels who perished appears to have been, owing to the lateness of the season, only three, of whom two died by falls or from exposure to the cold when too young to endure it, whilst but one fell beneath the merciless beaks of the cruel jackdaws. The latter, indeed, made one notable mistake, in attacking and destroying an old dray in which a pair of sparrow-hawks had built their nests, and being discovered in the very act, two of the ten jackdaws employed upon the work were summarily slain by the gallant hawks, and the others fled away, many of them maimed and wounded. But, of the band of plunderers, some two hundred, who entered the wood to do the old hedgehog's work, all the rest returned to their homes without injury, having done what they had to do thoroughly and completely, and chuckling over the mischief with much satisfaction.

Great, indeed, was the consternation of the squirrels when they discovered what had occurred. It had all taken place in about an hour's time, for the jackdaws, having obeyed the orders of their mistress, and made a previous search of the wood and neighbouring plantations, had been able to go straight to their work, and had performed it as expeditiously as possible. It might have been difficult, indeed, for the squirrels to have discovered either the perpetrators of this cruel outrage, or the motives which had inspired them, had



it not been for the busy jays, whose gossiping, mischievous propensities now proved of some use. They had lost no time in discovering the presence of so many strangers in the wood, and, after screeching at them a little while, had gone near enough to some of the detachments to question them as to their purpose, and had found no difficulty in learning the whole details of the business from the chattering jackdaws. These they presently unfolded to the squirrels, not because they were particularly friendly to them rather than to their enemies, but because every jay has a constitutional objection to keeping a secret, and enjoys a little tittle-tattle as much as any old woman that ever drank tea and talked about her neighbours. So the murder was very soon out, and the squirrels knew all about it.

Of course their anger was unbounded. What had they done to be served thus? A trifling accident, or, to put it at the worst, a slight offence given by one of their number to an animal of another—and certainly not, in the estimation of the world, a superior—race, had been thus visited upon their whole tribe, and that without any formal complaint made of the offender to them *as* a tribe, so that they might have fairly and fully investigated the matter. It was shameful; it was scandalous; the conduct of the mercenary jackdaws was bad enough, but that of the wretched old hedgehog was atrocious. Hand in hand the thirty squirrels joined together, and, having placed the bodies of their slaughtered young in the centre of the ring, danced round them in a slow, solemn measure, which gradually grew faster and faster until at last it became one tumultuous whirl, in which heads, feet, legs, and tails

appeared to be all intermixed and confused together, until the whole number of animals fell prostrate upon the earth, filling the wood with their bitter wails and lamentations. Then, slowly and silently, each rose from the ground, and, advancing to the well-known sacred and dreadful tree on which the keeper of that wood hung stoats, cats, jays, and other victims of his game-preserving zeal, swore by the body of the biggest cat there (which had been hanging for nearly three weeks, and had about it an odour of sanctity more powerful than pleasant), eternal vengeance against the race of hedgehogs and the cruel plunderers of their lost homes. Then, one by one, they left that solemn spot, and presently reassembled at the main gate of Foreland Wood, standing upon ground where many a row of slaughtered hares, pheasants, and rabbits had greeted the eyes of jovial shooting-parties, and where many a hearty luncheon had been eaten by sportsmen with appetites quite as keen as their eyes and aims.

Of such things, however, the squirrels thought not; their hearts were bent upon revenge, the memory of their happy homes was deep within their hearts, the destruction they had beheld was yet before their eyes, and their hearts beat fast and their blood ran hot and wild as they set their teeth together and vowed to dare and do aught that might be necessary to prove that such deeds as those from which they suffered could not be done with impunity. Not long was their council—no disunion was there in their sentiments. One thought, one aim, one hope, one determination animated them all, and relief for their distressed feelings was only to be found in immediate action.

Messengers were forthwith despatched to the squirrels of Barracks and Bockhanger Woods, who were duly informed of what had occurred, and to whom was wisely left the task of chastising the audacious jackdaws. So comparatively easy, indeed, was this, that one is tempted to wonder that the birds could have been induced, by any persuasion of the old hedgehogs, to espouse her cause against the squirrels. The latter abounded both in Barracks and Bockhanger Woods, and retaliation upon the nests of the offending birds was both natural and pleasant.

Had the affair taken place a couple of months earlier, the revenge of the squirrels might have been ample and complete. As it was, the young birds had flown and gone, and the nests would not be required again until the following spring ; but, nevertheless, the jackdaws were speedily informed that their abode in the two woods would never more be what it had been, and that a terrible retribution would fall upon them unless they made to the injured squirrels of Foreland Wood such atonement as might possibly be within their power.

Now as jackdaws have in all ages of the world been famous for their sagacity, the particular birds in question, not differing in this respect from others of their kind, saw at a glance the force and weight of the arguments adduced by the squirrels. The latter being domesticated in the woods, which had long been chosen by the jackdaw community as their favourite breeding-ground, would have opportunities innumerable of disturbing and annoying them, whilst the old hedgehog's power of being of service was,

after all, not so very great, and the time at which that service could be rendered was, to say the least of it, somewhat remote. True, they had received part payment for their work, and had no reason to doubt that the old lady would keep to her bargain according to promise now that the work was done. But, supposing that she could succeed in turning over twenty hen-coops and exposing the young birds therein to their enemies, of what avail would this be if their own young, for whose appetites they desired the tender nestlings, should meanwhile have fallen beneath the assaults of the squirrels? Moreover, to have a ruthless, implacable enemy constantly at hand, at one's very door—in one's very tree, so to speak—was a misfortune too terrible to contemplate, and one which could not be regarded otherwise than with horror and dismay by the very bravest jackdaw in the country.

Honour and honesty perhaps required that they should maintain their alliance with the venerable dame who had first engaged them, but honour and honesty do not go for much among jackdaws, and, after all, they had done what they engaged to do, and if they now forsook the cause of the hedgehog, it would in fact be no more than the relinquishment of the payment still due from her to them for services rendered, and she could really have no legitimate cause of complaint. These considerations weighed so greatly with the jackdaws, that they hesitated for some time before returning an answer to the squirrel messengers. They cawed and chattered a good deal, flew up into the air and whirled about over the tops of the old pollards in which they commonly built

their nests, and made as great a noise and fuss about the matter as if *they*, and not the squirrels, had been the injured parties, and had received a fresh and bitter insult in the message which had just been delivered. This, however, was all humbug, of which there is still a great deal left in the world, among birds as well as among two-legged animals who are not blessed with wings and feathers. So after they had chattered and screamed and fluttered and wheeled about enough, they gradually settled upon the branches of an old oak pollard where the squirrel messengers had stationed themselves, and began to speak their mind in an intelligible manner.

Their inveterate habit of speaking all at once, and that in loud and discordant tones, somewhat prevented their statements being easily understood by those to whom they were addressed, but, fortunately, the squirrels were gifted with great patience, by the exercise of which, and careful attention to the different speakers, they were enabled to comprehend something of their meaning. After a time, too, some of the birds became tired, and others perceived that they were out-cawed, and might as well save their voices for a more favourable opportunity. So then only six or eight chattered on at the same time, and at last all gave way to one very ancient bird, whose grey head showed his age as much as his keen, flashing eye betokened his cunning.

When the lull came which enabled him to be heard, these were the words to which he was giving utterance: 'What is the old hedgehog to us? A prickly beast that never did anybody a good turn

unless for her own purposes ! Why should we quarrel with our own home animals for such as she is ? An unsociable reptile, that curls herself up directly one looks at or speaks to her ! Literally and actually wrapped up in herself, as one may say ! Bother the old hedgepig !' And immediately the whole chorus of bystanders burst out with one shrill cry, ' Bother the old hedgepig !'

This cry gladdened the hearts of the messenger squirrels, and they were still more pleased when the old jackdaw continued : ' Everybody knows that we jackdaws dearly love a bit of mischief, and when we were paid to go and play that trick in Foreland Wood it was impossible to resist the temptation. But we never gave a thought to the fact that we were injuring the relatives of our friends the squirrels of Barracks and Bockhanger ! Never gave it a thought ! By the raven's nest in the big fir-tree we didn't, or we wouldn't have done it for twenty hedgepigs. Bother the old hedgepig !' And again the shrill chorus arose on all sides, ' Bother the old hedgepig !'

The squirrels now saw that the popular feeling was so decidedly in their favour that the moment had come when it might be turned to advantage, and accordingly they desired to be allowed to speak once more. This was of course readily granted, and as soon as the hubbub had somewhat subsided, they proceeded to state that the squirrels as a nation had no quarrel with the jackdaws, and would never have thought of molesting them had they not obeyed the behests of the hedgehog and so cruelly attacked the drays in

Foreland Wood. Such outrages, observed the messengers (and here they spoke with much dignity), could not be permitted to pass unnoticed or unpunished, and they would be amply justified in demanding the execution, or surrender into their hands as prisoners, of the leaders of the marauding force.

At this point a shriek of doubt and dissent arose from the feathered bystanders, but the squirrels hastened to reassure them by declaring that such a demand as that to which they had alluded was by no means within their instructions. 'The community of squirrels,' said they, 'guided by feelings of humanity as well as justice, does not desire that any person should suffer for acts thoughtlessly committed at the instigation of another; that other is the real culprit, upon whom should justly fall the vengeance of the law.' They then proceeded to state the atonement which would, in the view of the council of squirrels, satisfy the ends of justice, and prevent that retaliation against the race of jackdaws which would otherwise certainly take place. They required that the jackdaws should immediately abandon their unnatural alliance with the old hedgehog, and should engage to abstain from any acts of hostility against the squirrels for all time to come. This, however, was not all. So cruel, unjust, and unprovoked an assault as had been made upon the drays in Foreland Wood could only be atoned for by punishment inflicted by the same hands upon the individual who had prompted the outrage. If the jackdaws were sincere in their expressions of regret for what had occurred, they could easily prove their

sincerity by becoming the instruments of the squirrels' vengeance upon the hedgehog.

As soon as the messengers had come to this part of their address, they were interrupted by nearly all the jackdaws at once, speaking with great fervour and expressing different opinions. Some—but these were very few—expressed their doubts as to the propriety of not only forsaking an alliance, but changing from friend to foe with such extraordinary rapidity without any warning to or communication with the person against whom they were now to act, after having so lately rendered her every assistance in their power. Others began to demand loudly how they could injure such an animal as a hedgehog, who defended itself simply by rolling its body into a ball, and presenting to its enemies a bristling array of pointed spears, as it were, most unpleasant and even dangerous to touch. Some, again, thought that the squirrels were asking too much, and that the matter was of too much importance to be decided at once, whilst another party clamoured wildly, without saying or meaning anything particular. The undoubted majority, however, only saw in the proposition of the squirrels a new opportunity of doing mischief to somebody else, and accordingly greeted it with much enthusiasm.

When order had been at length restored, the same old jackdaw who had spoken before, again became the spokesman of his tribe. He said, by way of beginning pleasantly, 'Bother the old hedgepig!' which at once betrayed the bent of his mind, pleased the messenger squirrels, and gave confidence to those who were inclined to listen favourably to the proposal just made



to them. Then the wary old bird continued: 'Have we done wrong or have we haven't? Are we sorry for spoiling the squirrel-drays or are we ain't? If we are, why not show it? I'm a squirrel-bird, I am! Skug for ever! Bother the old hedgepig!' And with these words, instantly followed by the same chorus as before, the old bird delivered his sentiments, and then cocked his head on one side, twinkled his eyes vehemently, and waited to see whether anyone would contradict him.

The affair was not to be concluded in a moment. Many other birds gave their opinions, but one fact weighed with the vast majority of them more than anything else, namely, that the evil which might result from a war with the squirrels would be immensely greater than any good which could possibly arise from a continued alliance with the hedgehog. Evidently it was their interest to do that which the messengers desired, and although in communities of jackdaws self-interest must not be supposed to exercise a greater sway over the counsels of the wise than is the case in communities of men, yet both in the one and the other it is always permitted to have its due weight. And so the end of the matter was that the jackdaws agreed to repudiate the old hedgehog altogether; to express their regret for what had occurred, to promise faithfully to be true friends to the squirrels in future, and to undertake to assist them in their schemes of vengeance by any and every means within their power. Thereupon the messengers joyfully retired from the place of conference (which had been a well-known tree of gigantic size in a clear space about the middle of Barracks

Wood), and wended their way back to Foreland, full of satisfaction at the result of their mission.

Meanwhile, the old hedgehog must not be forgotten or neglected, which, indeed, would be wrong, considering that both her age and sex entitle her to every attention. She had, as may well be supposed, been vastly delighted at the success of her scheme, and the destruction of the homes of her enemies. On the day appointed for that destruction (of which she had been duly notified by the jackdaws), she had been filled with anxiety as to the result, knowing, as she did, the restless activity of the squirrel nature, which caused those little animals to be constantly on the alert, and ready to suspect anything out of the ordinary course, or any person not a regular inhabitant of the wood. She was consequently full of fear lest their suspicions should be aroused by the presence of so many unwonted visitors in the shape of jackdaws, and that the whole plot might thus be discovered. Nor was it without some doubt and dread that she hid herself under a heap of dry leaves near the tree which contained the largest dray in the wood, and peeped out in cautious expectation of what would follow.

As has been related, however, her fears were groundless, and her doubts speedily dispelled. The squirrels, completely taken by surprise, lost their homes without an effort to defend them. Unaware of any quarrel with the jackdaws, and entirely unsuspecting of the presence of an enemy, they offered no resistance whatever to the fatal inroad, of which, indeed, they were scarcely aware before it had terminated, and the mischief had been effected. Never

was success more rapid and complete. The hedgehog viewed with savage satisfaction the fulfilment of her design, and had, moreover, the pleasure of witnessing from her hiding-place the misery and lamentations of the squirrels on their return to the dray by which she had taken up her station. She would have ventured out to increase their sorrow by taunts and bitter words, had she not feared the possible consequences, for although her thick skin and stout bristles would have protected her from the amount of punishment which she had richly earned at their hands, the little animals, if so disposed, might have annoyed her considerably by a joint and determined attack. So she judged discretion to be the better part of valour, and remained quietly where she was until evening approached. Then she scuttled off to her den in a deserted rabbits' hole, and forthwith issued invitations to several friends to whom she judged it expedient to impart the tale of her triumph.

By the hands of trusty messengers she summoned the toad, the mole, and the adder, who all duly appeared, although the others rather fought shy of the last-mentioned gentleman, who had an awkward habit of stinging to which they all objected. On this occasion, however, he was civil and even pleasant in his conversation, and heard with great glee of the discomfiture of the squirrels. For, being naturally of an envious and malicious disposition, he cherished an in-born hatred of all animals superior to himself, and mightily grudged the squirrel his power of climbing into high trees and sunning himself on high branches,

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whilst he and other adders were obliged to grovel upon the earth beneath.

Indeed, all the creatures present sympathised warmly with the hedgehog for various reasons ; the adder for the cause which I have already stated, the toad because the venom of his nature induced him to hear always with delight of any misfortune which had befallen his fellow creatures, and the mole because he was so blind that he knew no better. So the old hedgehog sat chuckling with joy, and recounting the whole story, from her first meeting with the squirrel down to the events of that day, with many embellishments and exaggerations, all of course tending to exalt herself and degrade her adversary.

Suddenly there arose a scuffling sound outside the hole in which they were assembled, which caused them all to look at one another in visible trepidation. 'Mole-catchers !' ejaculated the mole, a grey tint stealing over his dark, soft body as he spoke. 'Snakes !' cried the toad, with a furtive glance at the adder. 'Boys !' hissed the adder, who, having seen sundry of his race crushed by the heel of man, had ever an unholy hatred and fear of them and their young. 'Terriers !' growled the hedgehog, surlily. And thus each animal at once imagined the sound to proceed from that particular creature which experience had proved to be most troublesome to his own kind. However, as the scuffling continued, and appeared to their listening ears to partake somewhat of the fluttering of wings, their fears gradually subsided, and the old hedgehog herself volunteered to creep out and see what was the matter.

Accordingly, she proceeded very warily to approach the mouth of the hole, and, on arriving thereat, saw before her by the light of the waning sun, nothing more nor less than two jackdaws, of whom she demanded their errand in tones less civil than were warranted by the occasion, inasmuch as she asked them what the dickens they meant by kicking up such a hullabaloo?

Being well acquainted with the character and disposition of the venerable lady, the two jackdaws merely replied that she was a thundering old fool for speaking to them in that manner, since they had come there simply and solely as her friends; and thereupon they proceeded to give her a full and true account of all that had passed between the squirrel messengers and the jackdaws of Barracks and Bockhanger Woods. The fact was, that in her distribution of bribes to the jackdaws in the first instance, these particular birds had become the fortunate possessors of certain pieces of red flannel which she had somehow or other acquired. This gift, both by its attractive colour and great utility in warming their nests, had so mightily pleased the recipients, that they had felt more cordially towards the donor than did many of their companions. When, therefore, they saw the alliance about to be severed, and the hedgehog betrayed into the hands of her foes, they had sufficient gratitude to determine within themselves that at least she should be warned of her danger.

No discipline existed among the jackdaw tribe; there was no roll-call, no obligation to be in the roosting-trees at a particular time. Everybody flew

about as he liked, when and where it suited him best, and no questions were ever asked as to where a bird had been or how he had passed his time. The two confederates had therefore no difficulty in leaving the wood and coming off to tell the hedgehog their news. It may easily be imagined that the tidings filled her with considerable alarm. She had so thoroughly well succeeded in her first campaign, and that through the prowess of her allies, that her very success made her dread in a tenfold degree the consequences of having those very allies arrayed upon the side of her enemies upon the next occasion of hostilities. She called to her side her three companions, and after warmly thanking the two jackdaws, asked them once more to repeat their tale. Observing the adder, the birds hopped lightly on to a neighbouring tree before they complied with her request, which they then did with great readiness, for a jackdaw is never averse to chattering, and has no objection to saying the same thing over and over again.

As they proceeded, the four friends looked gloomily at each other. The hedgehog shook in every bristle, the toad spit thoughtfully, the adder hissed in a meditative manner and the mole stuck his nose in the ground as if he thought of burrowing immediately and so getting away from the troubles of the upper world. After a while the hedgehog spoke out in a low but emphatic tone. 'Blunt my bristles!' she said. 'Exactly my opinion,' at once remarked her three companions; at which she glared fearfully but spoke not again for some few seconds. Then she uttered the mysterious words which follow, in the

same low but stern tones. 'Conglomerations of concurrent contingencies complicate counsels and confound combinations of continuous catastrophes.' To this remark her friends once more yielded a ready assent, animals, like men, being not unfrequently attracted and influenced by high-sounding words of which they do not always exactly comprehend the meaning. As if she had by these words cleared her brain and arranged her thoughts, the old hedgehog now began to ask the jackdaws, in more intelligible language, some questions as to what had occurred at the meeting of which they spoke. She was especially anxious to know what motives had been at work to cause that sudden and complete change of opinion in the jackdaw nation which threatened her with such disastrous consequences, and also whether there was not a strong party, although perhaps a minority, among the birds who still desired to adhere to an alliance, the engagements of which, so far as they had become due, had been faithfully and scrupulously fulfilled by the other party to the contract.

Her heart sank within her when she heard of the unanimity with which the whole assembly of birds had thrown her over, and resolved that their interests and inclination were equally on the side of the squirrel. More than this the two jackdaws could not tell her. As far as they knew, no definite plan of action had been formed, and no scheme against her was as yet matured either by beast or bird. They added that they considered they had now done all that she had any right to expect of them, and that they could aid her no more, adding with the common

impudence of their nation, that as she kept such disreputable company, they could not compromise themselves by remaining any longer in her society.

With these words (which mightily offended the three friends), they flew off, leaving the old lady in a state of consternation better imagined than described. What could she do? Where turn for allies? How escape the formidable combination with which she was threatened? She glanced at her three friends, but of what avail would be their assistance? The adder could, it is true, strike a deadly blow, but it was a thousand chances to one against his getting near enough to inflict such a blow upon a winged enemy, and moreover his nature was not one upon which she could rely for prompt and generous assistance in a matter in which his own personal interests were not immediately involved. The toad could do still less, and the mole positively nothing at all. What then could save her from being obliged to yield to the evils which seemed to be gathering around her, and from falling an easy, helpless victim to the justly aroused ire of her foes?

Observing that their hostess was in trouble and distress of mind, the three guests now thought it time to proffer their consolation and advice. The adder spoke first, and gave it as his opinion that she should rouse herself to immediate action, seek new allies in every quarter, and try to set all the animals she could get hold of against both squirrels and jackdaws. The toad, on the contrary, advised her to take no trouble whatever about the matter, but to set all her enemies at defiance and treat them with supreme contempt.



The mole, again, held views of a character essentially different, and recommended his friend to quit that neighbourhood at once. Moreover, he surpassed the others in that he gave practical proof of his sincerity, by offering the hedgehog to construct for her a subterranean passage by which she might secretly escape without her foes being aware of her departure. To this course, indeed, the old hedgehog would probably have inclined, had she been thoroughly convinced of the possibility of its accomplishment, of which she entertained considerable doubts. In the first place, the mole required a much smaller passage for his body than would be necessary for her, and it was not beyond the limits of possibility that she might stick fast, and perish miserably whilst attempting to follow her guide. Besides, she knew well enough that from time to time, long before she had reached a sufficient distance from home to feel tolerably secure, she would be obliged to come up into the open air, and at such times the eye of the roving jackdaw might easily discover her. On the whole, therefore, she thought that the project of the mole, however well-meant and kindly offered for her consideration, was one which she could not attempt.

She told the toad that it was impossible for him to feel more contempt than she did for her enemies, but that to sit at home despising them and doing nothing to protect herself, would be simply to court that destruction with which they so openly threatened her. The advice of the adder, therefore, appeared the best, if indeed it could be well and effectually carried out. But how and whence to obtain new allies? Against

the jackdaws it would be almost essential to employ birds. But upon what birds could she rely? The bats, who might be easily hired, were too few and too weak, the owls by far too respectable, to join in any such affair. The rooks would never trouble themselves to interfere with the jackdaws (who claimed to be their first cousins once removed), on account of a hedgehog, and the starlings, though always ready for a row, would be overmatched in such a struggle. The jays and magpies were generally friendly to the squirrels, from whose drays they constantly drew materials for their own nests, whilst the pheasants and partridges would rather at any time see hedgehogs killed than not, having their own opinions as to the habits of those animals with regard to their eggs and young. So the prospect appeared rather gloomy unless the friendship and assistance of the hawks could be procured, and this would be no easy matter; the hawks had no enmity whatever against the squirrels, and no reason for liking the hedgehog better than any other animal. Nay more, it was through the hedgehog's instrumentality that the jackdaws had recently destroyed a hawk's nest by mistake, and this might have probably inclined the haughty birds against her.

This very incident, however, which had been duly reported to the hedgehog, might possibly be turned to good account by clever management. It was the jackdaws who had done the mischief, it was the jackdaws who were now her enemies. What more easy than to represent to the hawks that, whilst employed on her business and in her quarrel against the squirrels,

the birds had gratified their own spite and dislike of the hawks by the destruction of their nest? She, the old hedgehog, could state that, being at the time in the confidence of the jackdaws, she had well known this to be the fact, and moreover might craftily insinuate that her own friendship for the hawks and consequent indignation against the jackdaws, had been the real reason of their turning round upon her and espousing the cause of her enemies. Thus she might hope not only to irritate the hawks against the daring assailants of their home, but to establish her own claim upon them for assistance against an evil which her devotion to their interests seemed likely to bring upon her. As soon as these thoughts had passed through the wily brain of the old creature, she determined to lose no time in acting upon the plan which they suggested.

She therefore dismissed her three friends, with many thanks for their advice, and set out at once in the direction of the tree in which the hawk's nest had been established. Being well acquainted with the wood, she found the place without much difficulty, and after a short time succeeded in attracting the attention of the hawks, to whom she speedily disclosed the object of her visit. The proud birds observed at once that the enmity of such scum as the jackdaws was of very little importance to them, and that as to the destruction of their nest, it had already been sufficiently avenged. They remarked, moreover, that the accident never would have occurred but for the old hedgehog's own behaviour in bringing the jackdaws there for the purposes of her private revenge,

and they felt inclined to leave her to take the consequences she had brought upon herself.

But the cunning dame was not to be thus easily repulsed. True it was, she said, and she owned it with contrition, that she had been the instrument of bringing the jackdaws to Foreland Wood. Still their highnesses the hawks might deign to recollect that she was a poor, meek animal, unable to avenge her own wrongs, or to protect herself against the enmity and assaults of animals who, like the squirrels, could not only move along the ground with far greater rapidity than she was able to do, but were gifted with the faculty of climbing the highest trees with ease. What could she do? It had been necessary for her to procure allies, and she had sought them elsewhere than in Foreland Wood itself because she loved that peace and harmony should prevail there, and could not endure the thought of setting animal against animal within that dear old wood. But she protested and vowed by her great-grandfather's bristles, by the snouts of all her children, and by everything which she held dear and sacred, that she never would have sanctioned the entrance into the wood of one single daw had she imagined that they would have been guilty of the profanity of touching a hawk's nest! Moreover, she had carefully warned them to molest none but the squirrels, and it was her rage against them for their wicked and daring act which had caused them to turn against her now. Indeed, she was credibly informed that they gloried in what they had done, and boasted that the hawks should not protect her from their attack. Old, feeble, de-

crepit, she had crept to the foot of their tree to throw herself upon their mercy, and entreated them not to let it hereafter be said that anyone in that position, especially one who was threatened on account of her loyal friendship to themselves, had been abandoned to her persecutors.

Touched in some degree by these words, the hawks were still more affected by the idea, so craftily inculcated by the hedgehog, that it was their own dignity and authority which would be in some measure assailed by the jackdaws if they should attack their intended victim in Foreland Wood. Observing this, and well knowing the love of power by which birds of this species are animated, the wily old hedgehog became still more fawning and obsequious. She said that she hoped no one could doubt her devotion to the great race of falcons. To her a hawk had ever been the incarnation of every good and noble quality. Their quickness of perception, their rapidity of flight, the grace of their forms, the vigour of their action, all commanded the respect of other animals, both beasts and birds. For herself, how could she better prove the sincerity of her sentiments than by humbly submitting her case to the two hawks before her in her present emergency. She would be guided entirely by their advice, and if they thought she had been wrong in the past, would be ready to make any apology, and give any promise that they might require of amendment in the future.

This total submission was so flattering to the persons addressed, that they no longer spoke of leaving the old hedgehog to her fate. On the con-

trary; they told her that there was doubtless something in the arguments which she had adduced, and that the jackdaws could not be permitted to interfere, either for her or against her, in the affairs of a wood in which they had no business whatever. They could not (which was just what the old lady expected and desired), interfere in the quarrel between herself and the squirrels, nor did they deem it necessary to express any opinion thereupon, further than that such things were foolish and had better be avoided. But against attacks from foreign foes she should assuredly be protected, and if she chose to take up her abode somewhat nearer to their tree, an attack could hardly be made upon her without their knowledge and immediate interference.

This gracious reply filled the old hedgehog's heart with joy, and she expressed herself more than ever devoted to the hawks and determined to deserve their protection. Forthwith she scuttled off back to her hole, from which she speedily moved her furniture and effects to one in the immediate neighbourhood of the hawks' tree, under the roots of an old hazel-tree stock upon the overhanging bank of a ditch. Here she ensconced herself with as little delay as possible, and determined to await patiently any step which might be taken by her enemies.

The messenger squirrels, meanwhile, having returned to those who sent them, filled the hearts of the latter with gladness by reporting the entire success which had accompanied their mission. Not only had their recent foes been converted into friends, but through their efforts the author of the misfortune

which they had just suffered would speedily be brought to justice. Nothing remained but to concert measures which might seem best suited to the circumstances, in order to bring the hedgehog to condign punishment with as little delay as possible. The degree of punishment due to the offence required no long discussion. Not only had the homes of the squirrels been harried, but blood had actually been shed, and the death of the animal who had caused this to occur seemed clearly to be demanded by the occasion.

Accordingly, it was resolved by the council of squirrels, and that without a dissentient voice, that the old hedgehog should be destroyed. This, however, was not a matter easy of accomplishment, even with the assistance of their new allies. True it was, that the vigilant eyes of the jackdaws might, as they soared above the wood, discover the enemy asleep, but, even in this case, although she might be taken by surprise, it would be for her but the work of a moment to roll herself up into an impenetrable ball, and in that form defy the utmost efforts of her enemies. Could she be once handed over into the power of the game-keepers, her fate would be secured, for these men were well known to be the determined foes of all hedgehogs. But the difficulty of doing this was immense, both for squirrels and jackdaws; the latter dared not for their lives approach the keepers, to whom they were little less hateful than the hedgehog, while the squirrels, often slain and not unfrequently enslaved, by man, eschewed as far as possible all contact with the human race. There remained, it is true, the great race of terriers, whose alliance might cer-

tainly be sought. Still this was not an easy thing to be obtained by the animals who now desired it. Terriers were not naturally inclined to love squirrels, and had never been over and above friendly with jackdaws. Yet as the thought struck the squirrel council, a pleasing vision flitted before their eyes of the old hedgehog rolled up in a ball, with a strong, wiry terrier dancing round her with short, frantic barks, about to make an attack which would prove the efficacy of his strong, sharp teeth against her thick skin. This would indeed be a glorious revenge, and the squirrels chattered their teeth with delight as they thought of it. Unfortunately, however, they knew of no dog, warranted to kill hedgehogs, whose friendship they might seek, and this alliance, therefore, appeared as unattainable as the other.

They had met together on the day after the return of the messengers, and were still discussing all the bearings of the case, when they were interrupted by several jays, who flew into the branches of the trees in which they were seated. Now everybody knows that the jay is a regular tale-bearer, and loves gossip dearly ; no bird makes more mischief in a wood, and nothing can you say in the hearing of a jay which is not certain to be repeated in twenty places at least before nightfall. So, as there were several of these birds in Foreland Wood, and all of them on the lookout for news, it is not surprising that one should have watched the old hedgehog's proceedings, heard her interview with the hawks, and discovered all about her removal from her old quarters, and the reasons by which it had been dictated. So they flew down



among the squirrels as they were conferring together and broke in at once upon their conference without ceremony,

‘Ha, ha, my boys!’ exclaimed one of them, ‘so that nasty old hedgehog has been too many for you after all. Only think of that!’

‘What do you mean?’ asked one of the squirrels, rather indignantly.

‘Why,’ returned the jay, ‘she has gone and made friends with the hawks, and it will be all beaks and talons with you now, if you touch her.’

‘How can that be?’ asked the squirrel. ‘The jackdaws who destroyed our drays by the hedgehog’s desire, also destroyed the nest of the hawks, and offended them dreadfully. Is it to be credited that they will take the part of the beast who instigated such a deed?’

‘That’s just it,’ rejoined the jay; ‘it was the *jackdaws* who destroyed the hawks’ nest, and it is the *jackdaws* who are going to help you. So it is *they* who are the hawks’ enemies, and neither you nor the hedgehog. This at least is what the old lady has made the birds believe, and at this moment she has housed herself safely near their tree and under their protection.’

A few more questions and answers convinced the squirrels of the truth of the jay’s story, and made them feel that their prospect of revenge was more remote than ever. Just then there appeared a party of five-and-twenty jackdaws, picked birds from Barracks Wood, who had been sent to the squirrels with a view of proving the sincerity of their tribe in the negotia-

tions of yesterday, and with orders to act as they should be directed. When they heard the news which had just arrived, they all began to chatter at once, and vehemently denied that it could be possible. A jay, they said, never told the truth if he could avoid it, and this was probably some paid agent of the hedgehog, who had wished to deceive her enemies. The squirrels replied that they hoped it might be so, but that as the hawks' tree was not very far distant, the jackdaws might easily satisfy themselves as to the truth or falsehood of the statement.

Being birds of a bold temperament they accordingly flew off, and, on arriving at the place, saw indeed a hole under the stock of a hazel-tree, such as the jay had described, which was a very likely place for the abode of a hedgehog, and in which indeed our old acquaintance was at that very moment concealed. At that time of day, indeed, she was not likely to be out of doors, and the jackdaws would have flown back with no other evidence of her whereabouts except the sight of the hole, had not a hawk suddenly darted from the tree and made a pounce upon one of them, which he only avoided by diving cleverly down into the bushes below. The hawk fluttered slowly up, and as he did so, exclaimed in a voice which sounded terrible to all who heard it, 'Let those who seek to hurt the hawks' friends beware of the hawks' claws.' The jackdaws scarcely stayed to hear these words, for although their number secured them against any real danger from the attack of a single hawk, they knew well enough how much they would have to suffer in an encounter with such an enemy, and were by no means anxious

to engage in anything of the kind. Besides, they had now obtained that which they desired, namely, information as to the residence of the old hedgehog, and the truth of the jay's story, which, indeed, had been completely corroborated by the conduct of the hawk. They therefore returned forthwith to the squirrels, and related to them what had occurred, giving it as their opinion that the old hedgehog had made a 'good move,' and would now be difficult to overcome.

The squirrels, however, were in nowise disheartened. They said that no doubt things had just at present a less favourable aspect than they could have wished. Still, truth and justice would always prevail in the long run, and they felt confident that by quiet perseverance they should ultimately achieve success. They asked the jackdaws to send daily, until further orders, a certain number of their tribe to be present in the wood at break of day, and watch, at a respectful distance, the abode of the hedgehog. Unless a miracle occurred (which they did not at all expect), the old wretch must require food, and food she could not obtain without issuing from her stronghold, and moving about in the wood. Then, when at some distance from the tree of her protecting hawks, opportunities might arise for compassing her destruction.

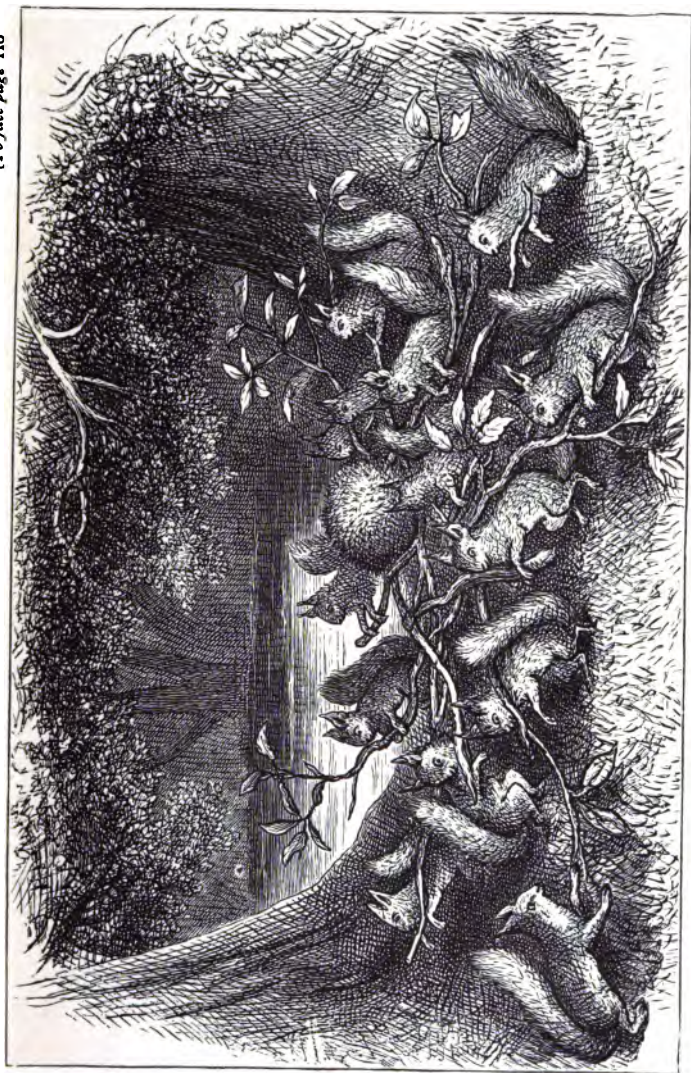
The jackdaws readily promised that a dozen or more of their number should come over daily from each wood, and that no exertion on their part should be wanting to carry out their share of the compact. So the day wore on, and the next and the next passed away without any event of importance. Whether the hedgehog was not hungry, or whether she had

stores at home, or whether the watching jackdaws neglected their duty, I cannot say, but they never reported to the squirrels that the enemy had been abroad during the period which I mention. But on the fourth morning came a bird flying in with the intelligence that the old hedgehog had left her hole, and was quietly enjoying the fresh air in the track between Foreland and Fuller's Wood.

Within ten minutes fifteen gallant squirrels were in pursuit, and sure enough there was the enemy, sauntering along as if at peace with the whole world. The fact is that she had previously been out late at nights, and early in the morning, but had never ventured more than a few yards from the adjoining tree. Finding, however, that she was unmolested, and remembering the advice of the toad, and her own natural means of defence, she gradually became bolder, and, tempted by the beauty of the morning and the freshness of the air, had ventured to sally forth to a distance of more than a hundred yards from her place of safety. The short, sharp caw of the jackdaws awakened her from her fancied security, and she immediately rolled herself up into a compact ball, and lay still and silent. Presently the pattering of little feet told her that the squirrels had been called, and she knew that she was surrounded by deadly foes. Still, so close, strong, and impenetrable was her armour, that she felt but little uneasiness, so long as they confined themselves to direct attack. A terrible thought crossed her mind, that they might watch her until hunger compelled her to unroll and expose herself to their attacks, but this she soon discarded, feeling

sure that their patience would never be equal to the task.

The squirrels surrounded her with exultant shouts, and told her without further delay that her hour was come, and she must shortly meet the reward of her crimes. The same squirrel who had been the originator of the whole business addressed her in terms of the deepest reproach, assuring her that his first offence against her had been quite unintentional, and that he had never cherished the slightest animosity towards her until she had so cruelly wreaked her vengeance upon the peaceful homes of his friends in that wood. Other squirrels spoke to the same effect, and the jackdaws continued to chatter incessantly. The old hedgehog all the while preserved an imperturbable silence. Firm in her belief that her foes could do her no injury, she remained rolled up as tightly as she could, listening without much anxiety to all that they said, but never for a moment dreaming of making any answer. At last they were silent, and she began to wonder what they could be about. A very short space of time unravelled the mystery. Suddenly, and to her very great surprise, she felt something being thrust under her, and before she could make up her mind what to do, found herself lifted from the ground. This is what had occurred. Unable to handle their enemy on account of her sharp bristles, the clever little squirrels had broken off a number of small green branches with the leaves and twigs on, which they had passed lengthways and crossways under her body, and thus made a kind of cradle upon which she reposed. Then, taking hold of the ends of the branches, and lifting them as



THE CONVOY OF THE HEDGEHOG



high as they could, so that the weight of the hedgehog's body made her roll into the middle, they walked along on their hind legs, carrying her with them in a sort of green-branch basket from which she could not easily escape. This was an awkward position for the old dame, and one which had been totally unexpected. However, even in these untoward circumstances, her natural self-possession did not desert her. She remembered that, in the direction which the squirrels were taking, there was a gap in the hedge, and a ditch beyond, upon the other side of which was an ash plantation, the corner of which nearest to the wood had been left unplanted, and was appropriated to the growth of buck-wheat for the pheasants. Even in her present disagreeable position she had the calmness to calculate upon the difficulty which the squirrels would find in crossing the ditch with their burden. It was too wide for them to step across, and how could they jump with the basket-cradle and its contents? The great probability was that they would drop her into the ditch. It was a dry ditch, that she knew, and if she recollected rightly, there were brambles, briars, and thick grass not far off. Once dropped into that friendly receptacle, no power of squirrel—no, nor of forty squirrels—could ever get the twigs under her body again, or raise her against her will, and upon this chance she eagerly speculated, and remained perfectly quiet. Great, then, was her disappointment when, instead of advancing along the path which led out into the ash plantation, her bearers turned sharp to the left, and took a little narrow track which led right into the heart of Foreland Wood. Here, too, there was a ditch,



but so small and shallow that the squirrels could walk over it with perfect ease.

Now, for the first time, the old lady began to tremble. Where were they taking her to, and with what intention? Well enough did she know that they meant her no good, but the exact fate for which she was destined she could not guess. Meanwhile the squirrels walked steadily forward, whilst the jackdaws flew chattering overhead, and so passed on this strange procession. Suddenly the hedgehog heard a shrill cry, and the next moment she felt herself dropped heavily upon the ground. Fearful to unroll herself for fear of the possible consequences, she remained for a few seconds consumed by the most painful anxiety, whilst the turmoil around and above her all the while increased.

The truth was simple enough. The hawks had attacked the convoy. Attracted by the sound of the cackling jackdaws, they had quietly sailed out to see what was going on, and on perceiving their humble servant and admirer being carried off, had at once darted down to the rescue. Each of the two hawks had forthwith struck down a jackdaw, and the others immediately commenced to make such an outcry as roused the whole wood, whilst the squirrels, half alarmed and half confused, had hastily dropped their burden, and stood hustled together, watching the combat in which they were unable to take part. The hawks, having struck the first blow, and knocked over two of the daring intruders upon their domain, were far too wise to pit themselves against more than twenty jackdaws, irritated by the assault upon their

companions ; therefore little more took place for a short time, save that every jackdaw screamed his loudest, and the hawks occasionally uttered a hoarse and threatening cry.

Presently, however, remembering the main reason of their attack upon the party, they flew down close to the squirrels, and haughtily demanded the immediate release of the captive. The little animals were brave, and, had it come to the worst, would doubtless have fought right valiantly in a cause which they felt to be right. Nevertheless, the beaks and talons of the hawks were sharp and strong, and, even with the superior numbers of the squirrels, the battle would doubtless have been severe. They felt sure, moreover, that if the hawks really knew the truth, they would not be thus taking the part of the hedgehog, and they at once determined to try whether the matter could not be fairly and satisfactorily explained.

‘Noble hawk!’ cried one of them (who on account of his readiness of speech had long ago borne the nickname of Everjaw among his companions). ‘Noble hawk! do you know that this creature whom we are bearing to her doom is she who instigated the cruel destruction of our nests, in which your own also was attacked and injured?’

‘That may be true,’ replied the hawk, ‘but I am assured that the interference with our nest was in direct disobedience to the hedgehog’s orders, and I find you in alliance with the very birds who committed the offence.’

Here a jackdaw interposed with an eager voice, ‘The hedgehog never mentioned your name, Mr.

Hawk. We were to destroy all the nests we could find, and I'll warrant she never thought anything about you.'

'Indeed,' added another squirrel, 'we always thought that hawks were free and high-minded beings, who would never uphold injustice and wrong; and what more cruel wrong could have been devised or committed than the destruction of our homes and innocent children by order of this cruel beast?'

'What!' cried the hawk, 'did you say that children were slain?'

'Ay,' responded the squirrel, 'and that, too, by the special order of the vile hedgehog.'

'Say you so?' rejoined the hawk. 'This puts quite a new face upon the affair.'

At this moment the old hedgehog, who had been listening to the foregoing conversation with much anxiety, thought that it was high time to interfere. So she partially unrolled herself, and giving vent to a piteous moan, as of one in much bodily pain, slowly and with apparent difficulty let her voice be heard. 'Mighty hawk!' she said, 'what wicked lies these bad folk are telling. I gave special orders to take no life in the raid upon the nests.'

'Oh, you story-teller!' cried half a dozen jackdaws in a breath.

'Tis true, great hawk, I vow 'tis true,' ejaculated the hedgehog.

'Must I not believe this worthy creature?' proudly demanded the hawk, 'who has not only placed herself under our protection, but has actually broken her alliance with you jackdaws on account of your destruction of a hawk's nest?'

... 'That's another story!' 'Oh, *what* a bouncer!' 'That is a good un!' at once broke from various jackdaws as these words fell from the hawk.

'How mean you?' asked he.

'Why,' responded one of the squirrels, 'our meaning is plain enough. The destruction or attempted destruction of your nest had nothing whatever to do with the breaking of the alliance between the jackdaws and the hedgehog. In fact, she never *did* break or wished to break with *them*, it was *they* who broke with *her*, when we sent messengers to point out to them the crime of which they had been guilty in destroying our nests, and how our brethren in Barracks and Bockhanger Woods would serve them the same next year unless they repented and forsook the hedgehog.'

'True, true, true!' cried the jackdaws on every side. 'Bother the old hedgepig!'

At this statement the hawk was mightily staggered, and forthwith demanded an explanation of the old dame. Conscious of her deception and falsehood, she could only stammer out something about her age, infirmities, and general devotion to all hawks in general and these in particular, which entirely failed to satisfy her questioner.

'Lying, deceit, and treachery!' he exclaimed in an indignant tone. 'But this is what one gets, and what, in truth, one deserves, for condescending to interfere with the affairs and quarrels of the inferior animals! I'll have no more of it!'

And thus saying, he rose slowly in the air, and prepared to take flight to more interesting scenes and

places. At that very instant, however, the loud report of a gun rang through the air, and the noble hawk turned over and fell lifeless to the ground. His faithful mate darted past the spot where he had fallen, but had barely time to glance at his body and receive the last loving look of the expiring hero, before she was compelled to save herself by rapid flight. The jackdaws fled in every direction, and the squirrels scuttled away on either side as fast as they could, leaving the hedgehog lying in the middle of the track. In another moment forth stepped a keeper, gun in hand, and strode along the track.

‘What the deuce has all this racket been about?’ said he. ‘I never knowed so many jackdaws down here of a morning. They bean’t after no good, I’ll be bound. Good job to have got that hawk, though.’ And so saying, he walked in the direction of the spot where the poor bird had fallen. He had been attracted to the place by the chattering of the daws, and was doubtless mightily satisfied at having secured a victim.

So far all had turned out well for the old hedgehog, and the squirrels, concealed in the bushes around, were fearful that some chance might yet deprive them of their captive, whom they had intended to carry up to the top of the wood, deposit comfortably in the little pond in Colt’s meadow, and compel to remain there until she was comfortably drowned before their revengeful eyes. But another and still more cruel fate was in reserve for the luckless wretch. A little white terrier had followed the keeper, as was its wont to do, in his morning’s ramble. A vast favourite with the man was little Venus, for neither cat nor rat could

stand before her for a second, and a dire foe was she to vermin in general. As the keeper moved on to pick up the hawk, he suddenly caught sight of the old hedgehog, and at once exclaimed, 'Ah! here's another of these nasty brutes. Venus, Venus!' No further calling was necessary; the little dog ran gaily up, and perceiving what was required of her, gave one short bark and seized upon the hapless wretch with an energetic fury which left no doubt of the result. Thick skin and bristles were no protection against that strong jaw and those sharp teeth, and in a very few moments the old hedgehog had died a more miserable death than her worst enemies could have desired.

As you may suppose, there is little more to tell. The squirrels, having witnessed from their concealment the cruel fate of their enemy, retired to their several homes, and comforted themselves with the reflection that they had been spared a disagreeable, though necessary task. The jackdaws flew happily back to their woods, well satisfied that the business was over, and by no means sorry for the fate which had befallen the hawk, who had dealt so severely with sundry of their comrades. Of the toad, the adder, and the mole, I never heard any more, and am inclined to believe that they never played any part in the history of the wood which would entitle them to further mention. The only person who really suffered undeservedly from the result of these transactions was the mate of the slain hawk, who mourned him unceasingly for three days and a half, and then took up with another mate of the same species, and was just as happy as ever.

For the gap that each of us makes when he drops

out of the circle of life is more easily filled up than we care to realise or believe, and even the nearest and dearest to the fallen hero generally find some other to worship when fate has claimed him. If it were not so the world would be too full of sorrow, and the rare virtues of truth and constancy would be brought to a perfection only natural in a higher state of existence. So thought, doubtless, the mate of the hawk, and for the sake of other hawks, and for the welfare of hawkdom in general, consoled herself to the best of her ability, and that with the least possible delay. There is no other animal of which this story has more to tell.

*THE PIG OF CHERITON.*

MANY, many years ago, when England gloried in magic art instead of electric telegraphs, and was controlled by witches and wizards instead of by the licensed victuallers and the county police, the extraordinary events took place which I am about to relate. In those days magic was found in strange quarters. Not only did the little fairies (who, as is well known, preserve their power in woodland glade and by murmuring stream even down to our own day) frequently show themselves and prove their supernatural power, not only did warlocks utter oracles from dark caves, and witches sport on broom-sticks and perform strange incantations in places of fearsome repute, but magical knowledge occasionally fell even upon members of what we, in our conceited self-sufficiency, call 'the brute creation,' and here and there animals appeared who were noted for their wisdom, and skill in imparting to mankind an insight into that future, the secrets of which the majority of mortals so frequently desire to penetrate.

Then it was that there arose among and above his fellows the Pig of Cheriton. How, when, and where he was born has never been discovered. His origin



was ever shrouded in mystery, which no one has, to my knowledge, satisfactorily explained.

I know it has been said that on one eventful day, when, very early in the morning, a famous sow in Bargrove farmyard produced a remarkably fine litter of pigs, a mysterious voice was heard to proceed from the barn, declaring that the wisest pig that ever had been or would be born had just entered the world, and that this pig was indeed the subject of our present history.

Again, there is a report that a fox of Ashley Wood, well known to be the largest and wisest in the country, was heard to lament and weep bitterly for several nights together, and on being asked the reason by his companions, replied that there would be no more chance for any fox to carry off piglings, for he had successfully seized upon one from Signe farm, which had suffered him to take it until he was near the wood, had then suddenly laid its paw upon his head, and after pronouncing some strange words to him which completely paralysed and stupefied him, had gone quietly away. 'Doubtless,' said the wise fox, 'that pig will introduce a new era ; he will, by his power, protect all little pigs in this neighbourhood, and there will be no more pork for us foxes.'

A third story was that the master of Cheriton Court had once been surprised by a sow bringing him a pig in her mouth one day, and depositing it at his feet with every manifestation of respect. On taking it up, the little creature spoke to him in a human voice, and told him that, being destined for great things, it must be brought up in his house, and he should never regret

it. Struck by the singularity of the circumstance—and the pig—he complied with the request, educated the animal with his own family, and prospered ever afterwards.

But all these are vague rumours and reports which rest upon no safe and substantial foundation. All we really know is that the Pig of Cheriton lived in a recess in the famous Chalk Hills in that parish, and those who at the present day visit 'The Cherry gardens,' so well known to dwellers in and visitors at Folkestone, will not be very far off from the home and habitation of this wonderful and celebrated creature. The Pig was by no means an inaccessible animal at the time of which we speak. True, he confined himself a good deal to his den or its immediate neighbourhood, although his deep and not unfriendly grunt might sometimes be heard at a little distance therefrom, and his visits to Cheriton and Ashley Woods were not unfrequent. The latter, indeed, although in the parish of Newington, was held by many persons to be sacred to the Pig of Cheriton, who, however, could only claim a divided property in a place so noted for the fairy beings who constantly inhabited it, sported down the great broad green track which divides it in two, and roamed along by the rippling little stream which winds through its thickest recesses, singing their fairy melodies and dancing their fairy dances under the pale moon and beneath the star-bespangled heavens. I suppose the Pig shared their authority in the wood, but at any rate he never quarrelled with them, or they with him, and they seemed to agree very comfortably.

In many respects, Cheriton was not then what it is now. In the first place, there was no railroad. At the present time, if you want to go to Cheriton, you must proceed by the South Eastern Railway as far as Westenhanger, then change carriages for the Hythe branch, and go to the Sandgate station, which lands you at the southern extremity of the parish. Or, if you prefer the northern side, do not change carriages at Westenhanger, but go on to Shorncliffe, and you will find yourself at once in the parish, and close to the camp which covers the large plain on the heights above Sandgate. But there was no camp in the days of which I tell. There was a glorious large plain over which one could have a good, stretching gallop, but there were no soldiers' huts, or wooden church, or control buildings, or hospital. All these things have sprung up of late years, and are enough to have driven pig, fairies, witches, and every other creature that loves retirement out of the country altogether. Neither were the roads so good as at present, and indeed the whole country had a much wilder appearance. The people were, perhaps, also somewhat less educated, but they were an honest, good sort of race nevertheless. They had, in some instances, the same names now as then. Out Newington way, towards the hill, most of them were either Rigdens or Hogbens, and, just as in parts of the Scotch county of Inverness, say 'Good morning, Mr. Grant' to any one you meet, and you are pretty sure to be right, so you were not likely to be far wrong if you saluted a man in Newington by one or other of the above-mentioned names.

Somehow or other, I do not know how to account

for it, the Pig of Cheriton had acquired a great reputation, and was regarded by the inhabitants of the district with almost unbounded respect. It was not that he had rendered them any one especial service, or that he had exercised any miraculous powers in their behalf. But the wisdom of his sayings and the soundness of his advice were known far and wide, and people consequently came from all quarters to consult him. They used to march at certain times to the mouth of his den, and state their complaints, to which sometimes, if they were very silly and frivolous, he vouchsafed no reply. Generally, however, he returned an answer more or less satisfactory, and some of these had become very celebrated.

A worthy couple hard by, whose child was growing up sadly refractory, and became naturally worse, as they spoiled and gave way to him more and more, consulted the Pig. 'Whip him,' was the laconic reply. The parents acted upon it immediately, and, finding it answer, repeated the process again and again, until the child became docile and obedient. Can we wonder that the Pig of Cheriton was thenceforward looked upon in that family in the light of a guardian angel?

Then there was a man and wife who were sadly given to quarrelling—the wife a terrible gossip and chatterer, the husband somewhat too fond of an extra glass of grog—who went to seek counsel from the pig. The simple words 'Drink less' to the one, and 'Talk less' to the other, had a wonderful effect, and still further increased the reputation of the wise one.

Nor, indeed, were his answers always so laconic, or invariably given in prose. A damsel from Folke-

stone whose promised husband had been absent for three days on a fishing excursion in rough weather, came to the pig in the extremity of her distress, to ask what she had better do in these trying circumstances. There came to her an answer to the following effect from the recesses of the Pig's den :

'If your lover shall safely come back to the town,  
No need of this racket and bother :  
If not, be assured that his boat has gone down,  
And doubt not you'll soon get another.'

As the young man in question never *did* turn up again, and the damsel actually married somebody else within a short time, this was always regarded as a great proof of the Pig's sagacity, although even in those days there were some who declared that it required but little knowledge of the nature of man-and woman-kind to enable anyone to have foretold the result which followed the drowning of the first lover. These, however, were mere cavillers, and this event, like many more of a similar character, must be accepted as evidence that Cheriton was at this time blessed by being selected as the residence of one to whom magic art was no mystery, and before whose power the secrets of the future unravelled themselves as in an open book. Indeed, anyone who felt inclined to doubt it ran in danger of incurring the vengeance of unseen but terrible enemies.

Had not old John Hogben of Etching Hill talked wildly and irreverently of the Pig, declaring that he would be far more useful in the shape of pickled pork than in his present condition? And had not John, within a month afterwards, slipped upon the hill and

broke his leg as he was returning somewhat late from a lengthened carouse at the public-house? No other proof could indeed be wanting of the great power of the Pig, and the folly of those who doubted it.

Now it happened that at the time of which we write there lived in the neighbouring village of Saltwood a man who bore the goodly name of Abraham Mucklepat. Worthy Abraham was a bricklayer by trade, and by nature a truly eccentric character. Tall and ungainly in appearance, he habitually wore a cotton nightcap upon his head, of a red colour, and with a long tassel attached to the top thereof. This nightcap was a standing joke to the boys of the neighbourhood, nor could Abraham ever pass across Saltwood green without considerable danger of being assailed with jeers and gibes by some of these youthful delinquents. But although this was somewhat of a trouble to him, the good man had his consolations, and chief of these by a great deal was the possession of an only daughter, the comfort and solace of his life.

Ruth Mucklepat was indeed made to be the light and blessing of any household in which her lot might have been cast. I don't know whether you would have been right in calling her pretty, she certainly was not the reverse—as indeed few Kentish girls are, and still fewer girls in the part of Kent of which we now speak—but Ruth had always a cheerful, pleasant countenance which it did you good to look at, the dimples on her cheeks were beautiful of themselves, and she always smiled with her eyes before she spoke, which is an almost infallible sign of a loving heart and good disposition. Such, indeed, had Ruth Mucklepat,

and her father had every reason to be proud of possessing such a daughter. She had never known her mother, who had died when the child was quite young, and it was to the fostering care of an old cousin, Deborah Marlow, who lived with them, that Ruth owed her earliest education.

Mrs. Marlow was a widow, and had kept house for her cousin Abraham ever since his wife's death. She was devotedly attached to Ruth, who for her part regarded her old friend with the affection of a daughter. Nothing could be happier than the lives of the three inhabitants of that cottage on Saltwood green, and until the events occurred which I am about to relate, it may fairly be said that their lives had been passed in uneventful tranquillity.

Strange times, however, were those, and strange things were yet to happen. Foremost among those who loved to jeer at and insult poor Abraham upon every opportunity were two boys, who bore the not very uncommon name of Jackson. They were the sons of a man who lived in an old tumbledown cottage hard by Saltwood green, and bore, like his dwelling, a very indifferent character. He was reported among the neighbours to have some connection with a gang of smugglers who were notorious upon the coast of Kent even at that early age, and his conduct gave colour to the suspicion. He was constantly away from home, had no ostensible means of living, and yet never seemed to be in want. There was something mysterious about the man, and his moody, uncouth manners, dislike to other men's company, as well as the violent language and threats to which he was apt

to give utterance if provoked, had earned for him in the neighbourhood the nickname of 'Terrible Jackson.'

For some reason or another, this man had conceived a strong dislike to Abraham Mucklepat, and had not striven to conceal it. Far from restraining his sons, he encouraged them to insult the old bricklayer whenever they met him, and no remonstrances had ever seemed to affect him. Indeed, there were not many people likely to remonstrate, for, when at home, Terrible Jackson did not approve of visitors, and few cared to run the risk of the rough and uncivil reception with which they were sure to be greeted.

He stayed, at such times, in his cottage till late in the evening, and then his short thickset figure might sometimes be seen loitering about the lanes, never without a short pipe in his mouth and a thick stick in his hand. It may be allowed that this was by no means a pleasant sort of neighbour for Abraham Mucklepat, still, being a man of peaceful disposition, he managed to keep clear of actual collision with Jackson, and avoided the boys as much as he was able.

There were other neighbours of a far more agreeable description. Widow Trotter at the shop, though as elderly widows sometimes will be, she was a bit of a gossip, was a worthy old soul, and always very kind and civil to Abraham and his daughter, and indeed, as for the latter, there was never a neighbour all round who had not a kindly smile and good word for her, and who was not ready to welcome her gladly if she chanced to visit them.

Thus stood matters then, when upon one eventful



day Ruth Mucklepat asked leave of her father to go with some friends for a stroll to Ashley Wood and Beachborough mount, from the latter of which there was, and still is, a glorious view to be obtained over the beautiful sea, and the valley to the right as you face it. Ruth's friends were not such as her father was likely to think objectionable. Young Webb, the son of a highly respectable mason in the adjoining village of Newington, had known Ruth from childhood, and was looked upon by the neighbours, not without reason, as far as his own wishes were concerned, as likely to become her husband when she could be persuaded to leave her old home. He therefore was constantly one of any party of pleasure in which Ruth had a share, and most careful and attentive was he to the maiden he loved so well.

But this day it happened that young Webb, though he had planned the expedition, was prevented from joining it, on account of a sudden summons to Folkestone, which he could not neglect. His two sisters, however, and Miss Dale, the daughter of the highly respectable clerk of Newington, were of the party, and several other young people from Saltwood completed the number. They were to meet half way between Beachborough mount and Saltwood green, and picnic on the mount, returning in the cool of the evening.

Abraham readily gave his daughter the required permission, and with many injunctions from good Dame Marlow to return in good time, to keep her feet dry, not get over-heated, and the like, Ruth set off in good spirits, although regretting the absence of her usual companion.

It turned out a lovely afternoon, and the afternoon of an English summer's day is *very* lovely when the weather is fine. Dame Marlow herself took a little stroll along the Saltwood lanes, and met Abraham coming home across the green ; the Jackson boys did not make their appearance that day, and Abraham was unmolested by anyone. He talked with his old relative as they walked together, and hoped Ruth would have enjoyed her day, and wondered whether she would be home when they got in. This was about seven o'clock, but she had not returned, and when eight o'clock arrived there were still no signs of her. Dame Marlow began to get a little fidgetty, but the calmer Abraham told her that 'young people would be young people,' and that they had very likely been tempted by the pleasant weather to stay a little longer than they had intended on the mount or in the wood. Ruth was getting on for eighteen, he remarked, and had a sensible head upon her shoulders ; she would come to no harm.

However, when nine o'clock arrived without her return, Abraham himself became a trifle uneasy, and putting on his head its accustomed covering, declared his intention of going to meet his daughter. Accordingly he walked from the green up the lane, passed Saltwood Castle, and away in the direction of Beachborough. Nothing was to be heard or seen of Ruth, and he turned to the right and walked across to a cottage not far from the castle, in which dwelt a family some of whom, a son and a daughter, had been of the number of the party with whom Ruth had made the expedition. They were talking and laughing

in the house as he approached it, and when he knocked at the door, a cheerful voice immediately bade him enter.

'Oh, is it you, Master Mucklepat?' said the owner of the house, 'and welcome too. What may be your errand?'

'I be come,' replied Abraham, 'to see whether your Jack and Sally be come home. Our Ruth she bean't home yet, 'and I was out a spying after her.'

'Oh yes, surely,' was the answer. 'Jack and Sally have been home this half-hour: afore nine o'clock a good bit they was home.'

Jack and Sally then came forward to answer for themselves, and declared that Ruth ought certainly to have been back long before. The party had all gone home. They had enjoyed their picnic on the mount immensely: thence they had descended to Ashley Wood and roamed about its pleasant walks, and had then come back to the mount, walked about Beachborough, and so come home in the cool as they had originally planned. They were sure Ruth must have gone with the rest, but they could not positively remember where they had seen her last, as they had come off together without waiting for the others.

Not much reassured by this tale, Abraham hurried back to his cottage, in faint hopes that his daughter might have returned some other way. No, she was not there, and both Abraham and Dame Marlow were now seriously alarmed, for Ruth had never been out unattended by one of them so late before. The worthy bricklayer set off at once to make inquiries at the different cottages from which young people had gone

with Ruth's party. Of these there were several, but all had come safely home, and having walked in detachments of two or three together, each thought that Ruth Mucklepat had been with the other. The only people yet unasked were the Webbs and the Newington clerk's daughter, but their homes lay in a different direction from that which would be taken by a person walking from Beachborough to Saltwood green, and unless Ruth had gone home with them (which was very unlikely), she could not well have found her way there.

Mr. Dale was somewhat offended at being roused up at eleven o'clock at night, and said at first he thought his position and dignity as parish clerk ought to have been sufficient to protect him from such an annoyance. However, on finding what was the matter, his feelings as a father prevailed over those which he cherished as a clerk, and he warmly sympathised with poor Abraham. But Ruth was not there; Miss Dale—Jenny Dale—had come home alone with the Webb girls, and Abraham was therefore prepared for a further disappointment when he reached the cottage of the latter. Young Webb, however, was now at home, and when he heard what had happened, eagerly volunteered his assistance in the search after Ruth. He and his father both accompanied poor Abraham, who by this time was half distracted with grief and despair. They walked up to Ashley Wood; they went to the mount; they inquired at the great house at Beachborough, but Mr. Brockman had been out hunting all day, and his servants had apparently made holiday, for they had not seen anything of the

party in the afternoon, and no one that they knew of had come to the house from the mount.

The poor father called his child's name aloud, around the mount, and on the hills, and up the valleys behind Beachborough. No answer came, but all was still and silent. He was overwhelmed by the extent and terrible nature of his misfortune. His Ruth, his child, his idol, his one hope, his one object in life, the prop of his declining years, the apple of his eye, his own darling, had been taken from him! Had she been ill, and died, he felt that he could have borne it better; then, at least, he would have sat by her bedside, attended to all her wants, anticipated her every wish, and felt that he had done all that fond father could do. But the horrible uncertainty of his present trouble increased his misery tenfold. *Where* was Ruth? What had become of her? Had the earth opened and swallowed her up? If such a phenomenon had occurred, the result would not have been more extraordinary.

Where to go to or what to do he knew not, and neither the Webbs nor Dame Marlow could afford him the slightest consolation. As to the latter, indeed, she was worse than useless, for, between sobs and tears, she suggested all the most horrible things she could imagine as having certainly befallen her beloved Ruth, and thus rather aggravated than otherwise the grief of the unhappy father.

Next morning brought him no comfort whatever. There were no signs of his lost daughter, and no news to be gleaned of her, inquire where he might. The poor man was nearly beside himself, and walked about the

very picture of grief and despair. As he roamed disconsolately over the green, Terrible Jackson suddenly met him. The recollection of the man's often expressed enmity flashed across poor Abraham's brain, and the thought suddenly occurred to him that this person might know something of his lost daughter.

In his then condition of mind, to think, speak, and act were almost simultaneous. 'Oh, Master Jackson,' he cried, rushing eagerly forward, 'where is my daughter? Can you tell me anything of my Ruth?'

The man repulsed him rudely. 'What should I know of your girl?' he said, with an expression too strong for ears polite. 'No better than other wenches is she, I'll be bound, gadding about the country after no good. Get along with you, and don't come where you ain't wanted, you old scarecrow.'

But the excited Abraham was not to be thus stayed from his inquiries. 'Master Jackson!' he cried again, 'I gave thee civil language and thou speakest but rudely in return. An thou knowest aught of my darling, tell me I beseech thee!'

'What should I know, thou old fool?' responded the other. 'Perhaps I do, and perhaps I don't. So the bonnie lass has flitted, has she, and the silly old father thought he could keep her at home? Poor old curmudgeon! Does he want his Ruth, then, ha! ha!'

At these words Abraham Mucklepat could stand it no longer, but rushed furiously upon Jackson, crying out in an agonised voice, 'Man, give me my daughter!'

But poor Abraham was no match for Terrible Jackson, who, stepping coolly on one side, brought down his bludgeon with such force upon his enemy's head that he stretched him senseless on the ground. What more he would have done I cannot say, for at that moment several of the neighbours who had been attracted to the spot by the sound of loud voices in dispute, came hurrying up, and seeing their approach, Jackson deemed it wise to beat a retreat.

Accordingly, giving one savage scowl at the prostrate Abraham, he tucked his bludgeon under his arm, and slunk moodily away in the direction of his own house. The neighbours raised poor Mucklepat from the ground, and helped him as well as they could to his own cottage, where Dame Marlow was greatly horrified to behold the condition of her unfortunate relative. She got him to bed as soon as she could, but the effects of the blow, added to the excitement caused by the loss of his daughter, had been too much for poor Abraham, and brain fever set in which confined him, a helpless invalid, to his bed for many days to come.

Meantime Ruth's disappearance had been the general topic of conversation throughout the neighbourhood. Never had there occurred such an extraordinary event within the memory of man. She had not only disappeared, but left no trace whatever of the manner or direction of her departure. It was all very well to lay it upon Terrible Jackson, which the good people about were all the more ready to do since he had knocked down the girl's father the very next day after her loss. But how could he, or any

other man, have carried Ruth off without meeting any person who might have given information, or, at all events, without her giving utterance to some sounds which some one or other would have been sure to hear? The girl knew well enough the enmity which the man entertained towards her father, and would never have trusted herself alone with him, and if she had accidentally fallen in with him upon the day of the party, how even then could he have got her away from them all, without leaving any trace or sign whatever? So some people were wise enough to reason, whilst others made no doubt that Terrible Jackson was the culprit, and this belief was strengthened by the fact of his absconding forthwith, which in truth he did the same day of poor Abraham's discomfiture, doubtless fearing that he might be called to account for the same. But people argued and gossiped in vain. No news could be heard of Ruth, and she seemed to have passed away from the world altogether.

One fine morning Dame Marlow was busily occupied about her household affairs, when she heard the sound of a horse's feet upon the road. Only for a moment, however, for the green was close by, and the rider was one who never hammered his horse along the hard road when soft turf was to be found for his feet. He came only across the road on to the green, and thence trotted up to the very door of Abraham Mucklepat's cottage.

'Good morning, dame,' said a cheery voice to the old woman as she stood with her back to the horseman, and, looking sharply round, she perceived that the speaker was none other than worthy Squire Brockman. For the first time for many days the



poor invalid had that day been assisted from his room, and was sitting in an arm-chair near the open window, enjoying the bright sunshine. 'Good morning, dame,' said the good squire again; 'I see you have got poor Abraham up at last. I just called to inquire after him as I was passing by.'

'A many thanks, squire,' answered the old woman, with the best curtesy she knew how to make (which was not a contortion of the body as if seized by sudden spasms in the side, which is the fashion in which better educated females of the peasant class have now been taught to salute their superiors, but a good, old-fashioned, respectable *bob* down and up again); 'a many thanks to you, squire. Yes, he be up to-day, he be, poor dear, but a weary time he's had of it, sure-ly.'

'Yes, dame, that he has, indeed,' returned the other; 'but let us hope, now that he has turned the corner, so to speak, he'll mend apace.' Then, lowering his voice, lest Abraham should hear and be excited by the subject which he was going to mention: 'Are there no tidings of his daughter, Mrs. Marlow?'

'Alas, squire, none; none whatsomdever!' was the reply. 'Poor man, he *do* fret over the job, that he do. How he did go on when he was in his tantrums with that there fever! It was Ruth this and Ruth that; poor dear girl, her heart would ha' broken if she could have heard him. For the matter o' that, squire, I fret myself as much as a body need, only this here business of Abraham has took up my time so that I han't had none to fret in.'

'Tis a bad business,' said the squire, gravely.

'Ah, squire, that it be, that it be indeed!' returned Dame Marlow. 'So young, and so fresh, and so fair, and so good as she was, to be took off like that, and no one never to know nothink about it! Oh, deary me, what a world we live in!' And here the good woman took up the corner of her apron and applied that unfailing remedy for sorrow to her eyes, which were fast filling with tears at the recollections just awakened by the squire.

'But,' said the latter, 'have you made all the inquiries which were possible?'

'Yes, sir,' answered the other, 'all as we knowed how to make, that is. Poor folks like we be can make no such great stir as rich folks might do, but we've asked wherever we could, and can't hear nothink.'

'Dame Marlow,' said the squire at this moment, leaning forward over his saddle, and speaking in a lower and more mysterious tone, 'have you tried whether the Pig of Cheriton can help you?'

'Bless us, no, squire!' cried the old woman; 'I haven't never giv it a thought. What with bothering about after poor Abraham, and all the house to do myself, and one thing and t'other to look to every day, I han't thought of the Pig, nor never been nigh him.'

'Well,' gravely remarked the squire, 'I am not learned in such matters, and it is not for me to advise, but all I can say is, that if I were in your place I should not be satisfied until I had heard what the Pig had to say on the matter. I have been told many wonderful tales of his wisdom, and he might help you even yet.'

'Thank ye kindly, squire,' returned the old woman;

'thank ye for calling, and thank ye for naming him as you have just named. I'll not forget it, squire, I'll not forget it, and I'll take your advice sure-ly. The Pig will I see the very first chance I get, as sure as my name's Betty Marlow !'

The squire repeated his opinion that this would be a desirable and satisfactory step, and then with a kindly nod and smile, such as the Brockmans have always had at their command alike for great and small, took his departure, and turned the head of his well-known old roan horse in the direction of Beachborough. His words had sunk deeply into Dame Marlow's heart. She could not imagine what had caused her to forget the Pig of Cheriton up to the time of the squire's visit. The Pig was generally sought after by everyone in that neighbourhood who chanced to be in trouble or perplexity of a serious character; scarcely, if ever, had he been known to fail, and was always accessible to those who sought him. How foolish, then, had she been to have neglected this chance of discovering something about their beloved Ruth's disappearance ! The mistake must certainly be set right with as little delay as possible, thought the good woman, and forthwith made up her mind to take the matter in hand herself, and consult the oracle with her own mouth upon the very first opportunity.

Accordingly, that self-same day she searched for and found a woman who was willing to 'mind' the house for her for a few hours upon the morrow. When the morrow came, she paid every attention to Abraham through the morning, got him up, placed him in his chair, and made him as comfortable as circumstances

would permit ; and then, telling him that she so pined for fresh air and exercise, that she must really take a holiday for a few hours in the open air, left the invalid and the house in charge of the aforesaid woman, and set off in the direction of Cheriton.

She took the footpath by Saltwood Castle, crossed the fieldsto Signe farm, left it behind her, with Parraker on the right, turned away by Underhill, skirting the ground beyond the place where now the camp at Shorncliffe defaces the formerly picturesque country, and bore bravely up toward the hill, and the abode of the mighty Pig. Somewhat tired was Dame Marlow, and very dusty, when she approached the end of her walk. Nevertheless, the cause which had led her to undertake it kept up her strength of body, and gave her courage to proceed. Dearly had she loved Ruth, and it was terribly sad and painful to have lost her in such a manner. Whether or no the Pig could and would help in the matter was more than she could tell, but she would at least enjoy the satisfaction of having done her best, and more than their best no one could do.

Animated by this thought, and determined to finish the task she had commenced, Dame Marlow boldly advanced towards the hill, and began to ascend the steep and rugged path which led to the cave in which the wondrous Pig held his abode. Large, rough thickets began to appear on either side of her, as she left the more cultivated vale, and came upon the wild base of the backbone of Kent. Here and there appeared a stunted tree, or, embedded deeply in the chalk, a huge root of some tree which had fallen before

the storms which sometimes swept along the hill-side. Between such wound the path, which the old woman ascended with some difficulty, until at last she found herself at the very entrance of the cave. Here there were rough thickets and brushwood in abundance, with briars and brambles of formidable appearance, and in the very middle of these was an opening through which anyone who was so inclined might enter the cave. Few, however, went so far as this, for generally it was thought and found sufficient to stand at the opening, ask the question which you had come to ask, and respectfully await the answer outside.

This course Dame Marlow proposed to take, and after waiting until her breath, which had somewhat failed her in her upward march, was sufficiently recovered, she said, in a somewhat tremulous voice, 'Muster Pig! Muster Pig! Here be old Dame Marlow, of Saltwood green, a-come for to ask about Ruth Mucklepat!'

As soon as she had pronounced these words, a curious low, moaning sound seemed to fill the interior recesses of the cave, as if the wind had got in there by accident, and was complaining that it couldn't get out again. Then a voice slowly spoke and said:—

'This matter is too vast and deep  
To be discussed with one outside.  
Between the thickets gently creep;  
Approach! and be not terrified!'

Thus bidden, the good dame felt that she had no alternative but to enter the cave, though, to say the truth, she would much rather have remained outside, not only on account of a slight uneasiness as to her

personal safety, but because she had a most proper and reasonable dislike to tearing her clothes, a result exceedingly likely to follow when a tolerably stout old lady comes in contact with a bramble bush.

However, she had nerved herself to do and dare anything sooner than return without tidings of Ruth, and accordingly without more ado she obeyed the voice and crept between the thickets. So well did she manage this, moreover, that her garments sustained not the slightest injury, and in another instant she had passed the threatening brambles, and found herself actually inside the cave. It must nevertheless be owned that she was not yet much the wiser for her nearer approach to the oracle of wisdom, inasmuch as the interior of the cave was so profoundly dark that, to use her own expression, 'you couldn't see an inch before your nose.' Dame Marlow advanced a few steps, and then stood still, intently gazing into the darkness. Then the same voice uttered to her the following words :—

‘Stand where thou art, and, void of fear,  
Ask what thou dost desire to hear.’

By this time the good dame began to feel really frightened, for to be alone in a dark place with an invisible person is enough to frighten any ordinary woman, old or young, under whatever conditions the circumstance may have come to pass, and when the place happens to be a cave in the side of a hill, and the invisible person talks in rhyme, it makes matters none the better. But, thought Dame Marlow, ‘in for a penny, in for a pound,’ and therefore she

once more gathered courage and spoke. As she did so, she stood quite still, and looking forward, could not help fancying that she saw some luminous appearance at the further end (as she supposed) of the cave, which to her somewhat bewildered brain and confused sight, shaped itself into something similar to the head, snout, and bristles of a gigantic Pig.

This she always afterwards made part of her story, but whether or no it was really so, or only added as an afterthought by way of embellishment, is more than I can say. Had she been better educated, the good dame would doubtless have now spoken in rhyme, but as this was totally and completely beyond her powers, she could only stammer forth in humble prose, 'We've lost our Ruth this month or more, Muster Pig, and if so be as as you can help us to news of her, we'll be mightily beholden to you, Abraham and I, sure and sartain we will.' A dead silence followed these words, and then was repeated the same low moaning sound which she had heard before. As soon as it had ceased, the voice which had already spoken again addressed her in these words :—

'Amid the haunts of mortal men  
Seek not the maiden whom ye love,  
The Fairies of the haunted glen  
Have taken her with them to rove.  
Fast kept and bound with Elfin bond,  
(If thou wouldst hear and know the truth—)  
The Fairies of the Temple Pond  
In durance hold thy gentle Ruth.'

These words filled the soul of the good old dame with conflicting emotions of surprise, joy, and sorrow.

Surprise she undoubtedly felt at the unexpected quarter from which it seemed that the blow had come upon the house of Mucklepat ; joy filled her heart at the thought that the maiden had suffered no bodily harm ; and sorrow soon supplied its place as it occurred to her that it would probably be a more difficult task to recover the maiden from fairies than from ordinary mortals. For a moment or two she absolutely said nothing, which is a strange condition for any of the fairer sex to remain in under almost any conceivable circumstances. Then she clasped her hands together, and exclaimed in a piteous tone of entreaty, 'Oh, Muster Pig! Muster Pig! how be we to get our lass back? Whatever are I to do along with them old fairies? Pray tell us, or I won't know nothink at all how to go on, and as to Abraham, poor fellow, he ain't noways fit for the job.' Then the same voice answered in low but perfectly distinct tones :—

'Round the Temple Pond there dwell  
Fairies of a mighty race,  
Hold they often under spell  
Those who venture near the place.  
But if one of womankind  
Over forty—not too thin—  
Seeks from friend the spell t' unbind,  
Venturing that place within ;  
Temple Pond first let her seek  
At the hour of setting sun,  
Not one word attempt to speak :  
In one hour the thing is done !  
But if once her lips she ope  
(Though she may no harm intend),  
Not for ten days can she hope  
Aid again to give her friend.



Ten days past—then once again  
She might seek the fatal shore.  
*Two* hours then must she refrain  
From all speech : or nevermore  
Shall her friend be as before.'

'Good gracious me!' cried Dame Marlow as she heard these words, 'why, 'tis me they mean for to try at this here thing, sure-ly! Forty shall I never see again, nor yet fifty, for the matter o' that, and I bean't what you may call "over thin" neither. But to go and stand by that there Temple Pond for a whole hour! Well I never! I bean't afeard, though, not I; and as for speaking, why, if so be that I goes alone, there won't be nobody to talk to, so I can't come to much harm that way, anyhow. Poor dear Ruth! to think of her being taken off like that, though, the bonnie bird! I'll see about the fairies fast enough, and thank ye kindly, Muster Pig.'

The old woman would very likely have gone on for some time longer in this strain, if a low but awesome grunt from the further end of the cave had not warned her that she must not presume too much upon the patience of the mysterious being whose aid she had come to seek, and who had already responded so graciously to her appeal. Being a woman of sufficient tact to take a hint of this kind, Dame Marlow forthwith withdrew, not forgetting to deposit at the mouth of the cave a small bag of potatoes, which she had brought as an offering to the great magician.

She descended the hill as rapidly as she could, and made the best of her way home. For, although her inclination would have prompted her to go at

once to the Temple pond, and forthwith to make the attempt to release Ruth from the bondage in which she was said to be, the old woman knew very well that she could in no case do anything that evening. The walk to Beachborough would have been beyond her strength, after her previous exertions, and would, moreover, have delayed her return home until a very late hour, later than she would like to have left the invalid. Moreover, the matter was one of too much importance to be undertaken hastily, and without due consultation with the father of the maiden ; and indeed she had some doubts as to whether it would not be necessary to consult Squire Brockman, and ask his permission, before she could take upon herself to go and stand for an hour by the Temple pond.

Leaving her for a little while at this interesting moment of our history, it will be well to recur to the day of Ruth's disappearance, and to disclose, without further reserve, the real occurrences which had caused such distress to fall upon the ancient house of Mucklepat. Anyone who has visited Beachborough, the old family place of the Brockmans, will know that it is built at the extremity of the flat land which extends from the present road from Westenhanger and Horton to Folkestone, up to the chalk hills. Pass the house and walled gardens, and the ground begins to slope upward towards the hills, which are covered with plantations immediately behind the house, but away to the left as you ascend, are only great, steep, grassy downs, with a huge gully running up from the stables and forming a vast hollow, in which are many trees, and one pond of great celebrity. This is none other

than the Temple pond, so called from an ancient summerhouse close upon the steep bank directly above the water, which has been rebuilt again and again, but of which no one knows the original builder. The pond is nearly on a level with the land upon the north, or hill-side, but on the south and south-west the hill comes close upon the gully, and the ground rises abruptly from the pond in a steep bank, between the top of which and the foot of the hill is a comparatively small space of level ground, mostly occupied by scattered beech and hornbeam trees, with here and there a holly, through which runs a fence which serves to keep the sheep and cattle upon the hills from the pond and field beyond it.

This pond had always been a favourite place with the Brockman family, who loved to stroll up the gully on a pleasant summer's evening, and to sit in the summerhouse and listen to the sounds which pervade the still atmosphere on the close of day at that season of the year. But to those who had not the good fortune to belong to the house of Brockman, the pond and the gully were equally objects of superstitious dread. This was especially the case with those of the lower orders whose education had been somewhat neglected, and to whom school-boards and their accompanying expansion of intellect had not yet taught to believe in nothing which cannot be logically and satisfactorily explained.

Reports had long prevailed of strange sights seen and strange noises heard in the immediate vicinity of the Temple pond, and the honest rustics firmly believed that creatures more than mortal had their habitation

there. Indeed, many of the peasants would on no account have gone near the place after the sun had gone down, and as it was not in the direct road for anyone to pass in his way to or fro any of the neighbouring villages, few people save those of the Brockman household ever had occasion to go near it.

On the eventful day of the expedition to Beachborough mount and Ashley Wood, Ruth had remained with her companions until they had returned from their rambles through the paths and glades of the wood, and had broken up into parties of two or three to walk about the grounds of Beachborough before setting off for their several homes. Then, as her own particular friend and companion was absent, I suppose Ruth did not feel inclined to find a substitute for that one occasion, and accordingly sauntered away alone.

Now the walled gardens of Beachborough, which are tolerably extensive, are situate, as has been already mentioned, immediately behind the house, and between them and the house on one side, and the high road from Hythe to Elham on the other, are placed the lawns and pleasure grounds belonging to the mansion. It was therefore to this, the east side of the house, that most of the visitors betook themselves, only a few, among whom was Ruth Mucklepat, passing in front of the house on their return from Ashley, and again seeking the mount, which is only some fifty yards in front of the house, on its south-west side, and to reach which one has to pass under the shade of some pleasant trees, and through a gate in the timber fence which surrounds and encloses the mount.

At the very top of 'the Mount,' which is really a conical hill of considerable size, is a small edifice well known as 'Brockman's summer-house,' which is popularly believed to have existed from time immemorial, and from which the view is magnificent. Her companions strolled once more around the mount or up towards the summer-house, but Ruth Mucklepat remained at the gate below, and sat down upon the bank, which was covered with thick, rough grass. Perhaps she was somewhat tired of the company she had been with, and rather disappointed with young Webb's inability to keep his engagement. At all events, she did not feel inclined to join the rest of the party at that moment, and after remaining seated for a few seconds, she rose, opened the gate below that by which she had been sitting, which leads to the Beachborough stables, and leaving the latter on her right, sauntered on until she had passed all the buildings, and found herself walking in a straight direction to the gully at the entrance of which lay the Temple pond.

Now if Ruth had been asked to go to the Temple pond at that hour in the evening (for it must have been past seven o'clock as she approached it), she would probably have declined to do so, for although by no means deficient in courage, she had heard so many strange tales of that locality that she would rather have avoided it. But, in the first place, I am not very sure that she knew exactly where the pond was, and in the second, I imagine that upon that particular evening she was not thinking at all about it, and was by no means conscious that she was

approaching the spot so dreaded by her neighbours. Her thoughts were probably running chiefly upon William Webb, and how much more pleasant the day would have been if he could but have been of the party, and so she drew nearer and nearer to her fate without once thinking or caring where she was going.

Thus slowly sauntering along she reached the head of the pond, from which a small stream gently trickled at her feet. On she went, and stood close to the water, looking right up the gully, so that the hill and bank, with the little 'temple' summer-house towards the further end of it, were immediately on her left hand. Near that end of the pond, the bank did not come quite down to the water, but a little space intervened, on which a person could walk and pick flowers on the bank, if so disposed. A sudden fancy to do so seized upon Ruth, and in another moment she was busily engaged in this apparently innocent amusement.

Whilst thus employed she was startled by a voice. It was not an ordinary voice either, but sounded something between the song of a wren, the hum of a bee, and the chirping of a cricket. And this is what it said : ' Who is robbing my flower-garden ? '

Ruth started, which it was most natural that she should do, and looked up in the greatest amazement. On the bank immediately above her, stood a woman, a very little woman, dressed entirely in pink, only she had a girdle of rushes plaited round her waist, and a crown upon her head skilfully constructed out of the same material. She was about two feet in height, and not bad looking, although there was a curious, mis-

chievous expression upon her face and a wild glance in her eyes which seemed wonderfully to affect the maiden as she gazed on her with the utmost surprise.

‘Who is picking my flowers?’ asked the lady, sternly; at the same time knitting her brows and putting on a most severe look.

‘Please ma’am,’ said Ruth, in trembling accents (for she thought it was not civil to remain silent any longer); ‘please ma’am, I didn’t know they was yours; I wasn’t after no harm.’

‘That is for *me* to judge,’ interrupted the other. ‘You have been caught stealing my flowers and must take the consequences.’

‘Please ma’am,’ began Ruth again; but before she could say more, she was stopped by a succession of strange events which deprived her of the power of utterance. Stretching forth her right hand, in which she firmly grasped a bulrush, the Pink Lady exclaimed in a loud voice:

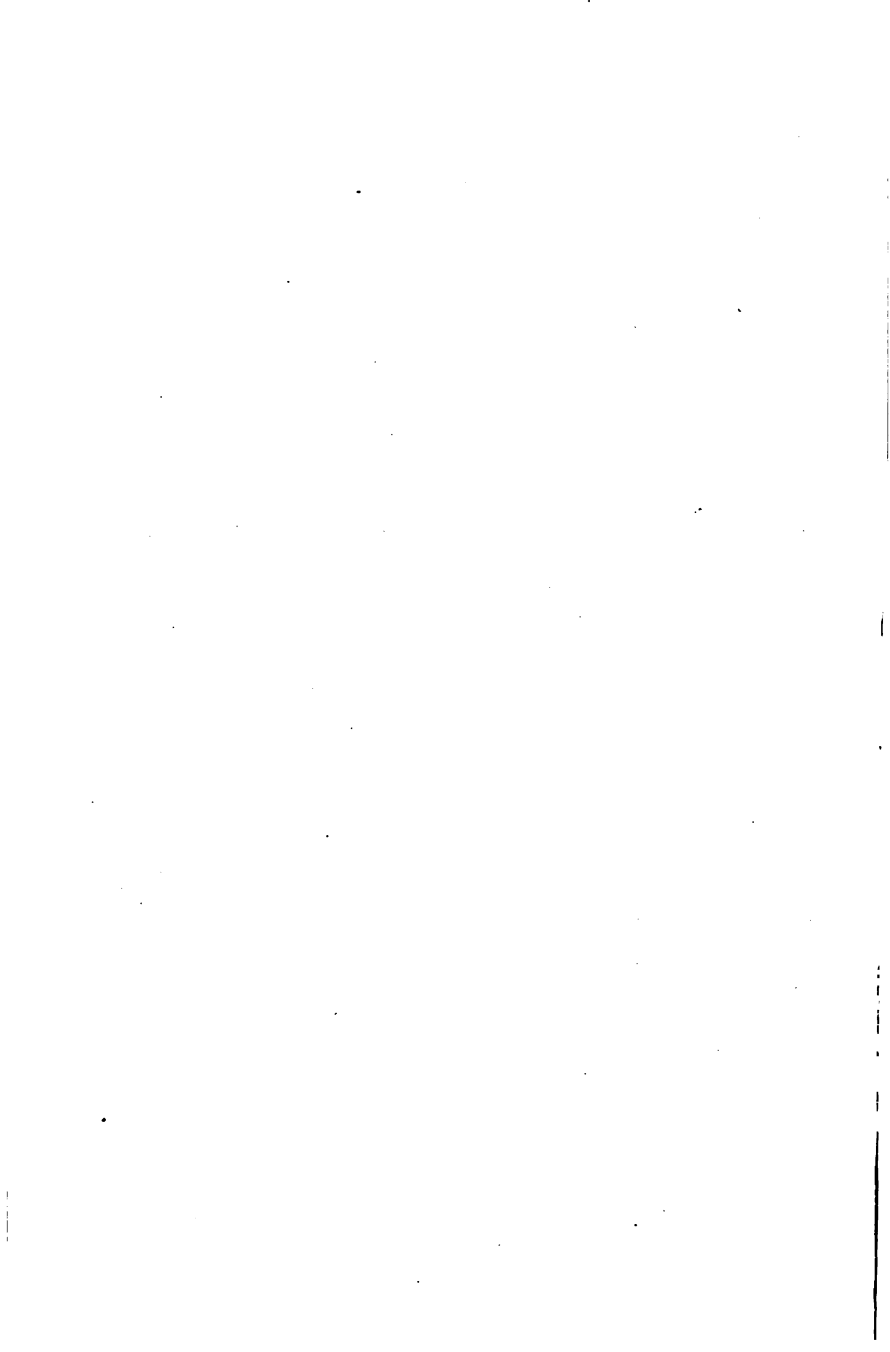
‘Children of the Temple Pond,  
Hear my voice and heed my wand.  
Since long time we greatly crave  
For our halls a mortal slave.  
Here is one—each gathered flower  
Brings her more within our power.  
Seize the maiden! and convey  
Quickly from the light of day.  
Children of the Temple Pond,  
Hear my voice and heed my wand!’

Even as she spoke her words were answered and obeyed. Ruth was suddenly surrounded by crowds of little beings, dressed in pink like the first, and with



RUTH AND THE PINK LADY





girdles of rushes, but without the crown. Where they came from she could not tell. It was all so sudden that to her astonished eyes they seemed to spring from the earth, from the pond, from the trees, or even, for aught she could tell, to fall from the skies above her. What they proceeded to do, however, she had soon reason to know but too well. She felt her hands, feet, legs, and arms seized, and before she had time to think, speak, or act, perceived that she was entirely without power of resistance. Then, in an instant, the Being who had first spoken struck the earth three times with her wand, uttering at the same time these mysterious and awful words :

‘ By the Hogbens of the Hill,  
Bank ! thy destiny fulfil.’

Immediately the bank opened, and Ruth saw before her a flight of stone steps, down which she was instantly pushed, and the earth slowly closed behind her and her captors, and resumed its natural position. The ground appeared just the same as before ; the flowers threw out their sweet fragrance around ; the birds carolled their cheerful songs in the trees around ere they retired to rest for the night ; the waters of the pond wore a calm and unruffled surface, and nothing in nature seemed to know or to speak of the bright young spirit which had just been taken from the upper world of light and life, and shut out from all the beautiful things which it had so much loved, and from those by whom it had been so greatly valued as the hope and pride of their life.

The stairs down which poor Ruth was pushed

were not very steep and not very many, so that almost immediately she found herself in a large cave, or room, from which sundry passages led to other rooms of the same sort, though somewhat differently furnished. The one which she first entered was entirely paved with polished oyster-shells, another one with large round glass beads, and a third with india-rubber ; the roof and walls of the caves being in each case of the same material as the floor. Ruth could not tell how they were lighted, but a dim, soft light pervaded the whole place, and she could see quite well where she was, and the forms and faces of those around her, though their number was too great to count, or rather they kept continually moving about with such rapidity that counting, to her dazed head and confused brain, was an impossibility.

After a little while the poor girl found herself pushed and hustled forward in such a manner as became decidedly unpleasant, and would have remonstrated with her tormentors, but that she was prevented from doing so by the shrill clamour which they all raised around her the very instant she attempted to open her lips. So, being unable to speak, she very wisely held her tongue. Presently she was ushered into a room, into which the Pink Queen (for such undoubtedly was the lady who had first addressed, and afterwards sentenced her), had already preceded her, and sat upon an ivory arm-chair opposite her as she entered.

‘Bring up the slave!’ said she ; and Ruth was immediately pushed on quite close up in front of the Queen’s chair. Then, to her disgust and horror, a number of little voices broke out with cries of—

‘May we torment her, please your Majesty? *Do* let us tease her! How I long to pinch her!’ and such like exclamations, which made the poor girl aware that she had certainly fallen into the hands of one of those classes of mischievous fairies who are only kind to mortals belonging to the particular families which they patronise, but who love to tease, annoy, and play tricks upon the generality of mankind.

Fairies, however, are very loyal to their sovereign, which is an excellent trait in their character; and it was with great delight that Ruth heard the Queen reply, in a tone of some severity, ‘No! decidedly not. I forbid any teasing, or even a single pinch. We have long been without a mortal slave, and, now we have got one, let us make the most of her. The way to do this is neither to starve, scold, or ill-treat her. On the contrary, be civil to her, feed her well, and treat her kindly. On the other hand, she will have to deserve this by working, as work she must, well and diligently.’

Then the Pink Queen addressed Ruth, and told her that it was no use crying (which she was just beginning to do) or repining at her lot, which might have been much worse. ‘Suppose,’ remarked she, ‘you had fallen into the pond and been drowned; or, again, suppose young Webb (for I know all your affairs, child), had thrown you over for another girl; or, more likely, suppose he had married you, and taken to bad ways, breaking your heart first, and possibly your bones afterwards; although I am thankful to say he would have had to have taken you into the Midland counties to do so, for we don’t stand wife-

beaters in Kent. But suppose, I say, that any of these things had happened to you, how much worse off you would have been ! Now, of course you don't like losing your liberty, nobody does ; though at the same time, let me tell you, there is a precious deal of nonsense talked about "liberty." A person may have liberty to starve, and liberty to be miserable, and liberty to be idle, which in reality is very much the same thing. Well, this liberty you have lost, but on the other hand you will have plenty of food to nourish your body, and plenty of occupation to divert your mind. So don't you mope and make a fool of yourself. You will have to sweep the floors of these rooms, go errands when wanted within the dwelling, and, under proper superintendence, look to the dresses of my subjects, together with some other trifling details which need not be mentioned now. In short, you will have to perform the duties of a maid of all work, and take care that those duties are discharged in a satisfactory manner.'

Every word which the Pink Queen spoke sank deep into poor Ruth's heart. She did not mind work, but the quantity and quality of the work sketched out for her was simply appalling. She had no idea how she should ever perform it, and her heart sank within her at the prospect. However, there was nothing for it but to submit, and all she did was to make one appeal to the Queen for freedom, founded upon the fact of her being her father's only daughter, and of the dreadful distress into which he would be plunged by her loss. This, however, had not the smallest effect upon the Queen, who, being a woman (as is generally

the case with Queens), thought that a male person might be allowed a little extra suffering without injury to the world at large, or at all events was not disposed to give up her new slave in order to prevent his enduring it.

So Ruth was dismissed to her work, and being told that she was to obey the 'pink ladies' generally, soon began to find that the inconvenience of having so many masters, or rather mistresses, was not inconsiderable. One or the other was always in want of something. The poor girl was sent hither and thither, and never allowed to finish her ordinary work quietly. She was sent into the inner room for a forgotten rush girdle, then back into the outer room for a mislaid slipper, to this place for one thing, to that for another, until she frequently felt half distracted, and began to have the most sincere pity in the world for that poor creature whom hitherto she had only known by reputation—a maid of all work.

Now doubtless there are some of my readers who would desire to dwell longer upon the scenes which occurred in the interior of that cave by the Temple pond in which Ruth's time of slavery was passed. I am sorry to say that I find myself unable to oblige them. In the first place, fairies are ticklish sort of people to deal with, and are apt to resent it very strongly if one tells more about the secrets of their dwelling houses than one is absolutely obliged to tell. Besides this, to tell the honest truth (which one should always do if one has the opportunity), I really am not so well acquainted with the details of all that passed as I should wish to be in order to give a full, true,

and accurate account of every particular. I know that Ruth Mucklepat had a great deal of drudgery to go through, and that her life was by no means an easy one, which may perhaps make some of my younger readers pause before they wish to leave their own comfortable homes to go and live with the fairies. Let them recollect that there are different kinds of fairies, and that although the great majority have no doubt many very friendly feelings towards the human race, and often perform acts of kindness to them, yet it is no less true that some of the elves are animated by a less pleasant spirit, and it might be decidedly awkward if one fell among these after one had quitted one's home on purpose.

In fact, there is no such mistake, in all ranks of life, as to think that by any change one is sure to 'better one's self;' and I should advise all persons who are tolerably well off where they are, to think several times before they try to do so. At all events, poor Ruth, who had *not* tried to better herself, and had never even thought of fairies being near the place, fell into their hands, as we have seen, by no means to the improvement of her condition in life, and very much regretted that she had done so.

We must leave her there, nevertheless, for the present, inasmuch as duty compels us to relate what befell worthy old Dame Marlow after she had left the Pig of Cheriton and returned to Saltwood green. She found Abraham decidedly better, and disposed to converse, and after a little while he began to talk about his daughter in quite a calm and rational manner, which he had hardly been able to do before.

Encouraged by this, Dame Marlow told him where she had been, and after duly cautioning him against being unduly excited, unfolded to him the mystery which had been disclosed to her by the oracle. Abraham was of course mightily surprised, but took the thing more calmly than she had expected. She must certainly go, and that the very next day, and he was sure that she would do all that was in her power to recover their lost treasure. There was little doubt of *that*, said the good dame, and they both retired to rest that night confident that before long their darling would be with them again.

I forgot to say that the Pig had made known to the old dame—though in what manner or in what language I cannot at this moment recollect—that she must wait until the sun was nearly setting before she approached the pond, as that was the most propitious hour for the business she had in hand. Therefore it was afternoon upon the next day before the worthy old woman set out upon her mission and trudged slowly over to Beachborough, which she reached about five o'clock.

Without more ado she went past the stables straight away to the Temple pond, being alone and unattended, as had been also ordered by the Pig, save by one companion, who was allowed to remain at a respectful distance. I need hardly say that this was young Webb, who had urged his just claim and could not be refused. So he accompanied Dame Marlow as far as the corner of the Beachborough stables, and stood there earnestly awaiting the result.

The old woman marched steadily to the head of



the pond, and stood gazing upon its placid waters. Her first impulse was to give a good loud call for Ruth, but she remembered the injunction to silence which she had received, and determined to utter no word for the hour during which she was to remain. For several minutes she stood quite still, and then all of a sudden there appeared two ducks, made apparently of silver, swimming upon the pond before her very eyes. Scarcely could she resist an exclamation of surprise, but knowing how much depended upon her doing so, she resolutely forbore to open her mouth, and calmly watched whilst the two ducks sailed close up to her and back again, when they disappeared as suddenly as they had come. The next moment, however, their places were taken by two golden geese, which came hissing up as if they were about to attack her. They did not do so, though, and were presently succeeded by two swans, which seemed to be made of pure crystal, and were indeed beautiful to behold.

But Dame Marlow was not to be rendered forgetful of her duty, and during the quarter of an hour which was occupied by these transformations, she remained obstinately silent. Then, after a short pause, a large bat flew close to the old dame's ear, and uttered such a shrill, unearthly cry just as he was doing so, that she had the greatest difficulty in the world to refrain from a scream. This desire, however, she also overcame, and folding her arms upon her breast, stood steadily silent whilst various other birds tried the same sort of trick, and sundry strange fishes came up and looked at her with curious eyes, or splashed violently as if to startle her.

And now more than half an hour had glided away, and, probably for the first time during the whole of her existence, Dame Marlow had uttered no sound. Then, quickly and unexpectedly, there appeared a lady before her, not a small, fairy-like lady, but one of fair size and dimensions, and with a countenance which at first sight did not appear unprepossessing, but which speedily became so in the old woman's opinion when its owner made the most extraordinary grimace at her, and made as if she was about to pull her nose. Dame Marlow felt her ire rising fast; she coloured, fidgetted, and longed to give the rude new-comer a piece of her mind.

Fortunately, however, prudence prevailed, and never a word she spoke, until the lady passed away, and instead of her there appeared a much smaller person of the same sex, who walked straight up to the worthy dame and quietly observed to her, 'Madam, are you aware that you are trespassing?' Now Mrs. Marlow knew very well that the real owner of the place was good Squire Brockman, and so she longed to tell her questioner at once, but she still had the good sense to be quiet, and three quarters of an hour had now passed away. She knew it, for the Beachborough stable clock had chimed a quarter past five when she first took her stand by the pond, and it was now just striking six. At the very last stroke of the hour a singular phenomenon was to be seen. Out from all sides rushed little beings clad in pink, with thin girdles of green rushes, and surrounding Dame Marlow on all sides, began to laugh at and jeer her, pulling her gown, snapping their fingers in her face, and even

going so far as to give her sundry little tweaks and pinches which were by no means agreeable.

She thought within herself, however, that their game must be nearly up when they became so excited and violent, and that a little more patience upon her part would result in a complete and decided victory. So she bore it all bravely until fully ten minutes more had passed away, and in five more the clock would chime out a quarter past six, and her task would be ended. At that very instant there suddenly rushed from the bank or the pond—Dame Marlow never could tell which—a little figure dressed in a similar manner to the rest, only that her garments were somewhat finer and she wore a crown of rushes upon her head.

Without any hesitation she came rushing hastily up to the others, and cried in a piteous tone, 'Away, away, all of you! Come with me, dear dame, come with me at once, poor Ruth Mucklepat is very ill, and requires instant aid.' Alas! alas! Dame Marlow had withstood the splendour of the ducks, the geese, and the swans; the screams of the smaller birds, the splashing of the fishes, the grimaces of the first lady, and all the tricks and teasings of the lesser tribe; withstood them all stoutly, and all but gained the day. But at this sudden appeal to her woman's heart, she forgot everything except that her Ruth was ill and wanted her. Betrayed by her affection, when every other passion had been tried in vain, she forgot all about silence, and in a moment cried out, 'Poor dear child! Where is she? Take me to her, pray!'

A loud yell of elfin laughter rent the air as Dame Marlow uttered these words. 'She is ours! she is

ours!' screeched out the little Pink creatures, and the Queen drew herself up to her full height, and coldly smiled as she answered the speaker. 'I thank you, madam, for your readiness to come to my slave. But, on second thoughts, I shall not require your attendance to-day; thank you so very much for answering so promptly. In another three minutes it would have been too late. Good morning to you.'

And, with a sweeping curtsey, the little being vanished almost before poor Dame Marlow had recovered from her surprise. She was not long in doing so, however, and having once used her voice, continued to do so with good will. 'What!' she cried, 'was you a deceiving of me, you hussy! Oh, the rascality of you? To go for to pretend that my poor child was ill, and all that you might keep her for your slave! Oh, you wretches; oh, you demons!' And the worthy old lady would have gone on much longer in the same strain if she had not perceived that there was no one listening to her. The little people had entirely disappeared, and there was no sign of life whatever about the bank or the pond, save that which was afforded by an ancient moorhen, who about this time slowly swam over from one side of the latter to the other, intent upon his own business and evidently not caring one jot for all the fairies in the world.

Then Dame Marlow plumped herself down upon the grass and had a good hearty cry. For full ten minutes she sobbed as if her heart would break, and would have done so, for aught I know, until the next morning, had she not been roused by young William Webb, who, unable to bear the suspense any longer,

and knowing that the hour had been for some minutes over, came up to where she was seated by the pond. It scarcely needed her explanation to tell the poor young fellow what had happened, and that he was as far off as ever from regaining his beloved Ruth. He was, however, too good and kind-hearted to upbraid the old woman, who, after all, had only lost the day through her too great affection for the girl, and was in sore distress herself at what had occurred.

‘How shall I ever face poor Abraham without his daughter?’ she asked, and burst out crying again as they passed by Beachborough stables. At that very moment, round the corner of the stable-yard, who should come walking along but honest Squire Brockman.

‘Hallo!’ cried he, ‘what have we here? A woman in trouble at the very doors of Beachborough? That must never be while a Brockman lives there. ‘Pon my life, too, ‘tis good old Dame Marlow, of Saltwood green, and Webb the mason’s son, along with her! What’s the matter, good people; what’s the matter?’ So saying, the kindhearted squire laid his hand kindly on Dame Marlow’s shoulder, and finding that she could not speak yet for sobbing, insisted upon it that both she and her companion should come into the house and sit down. Then he ordered a jug of good Beachborough ale for them, which he said was warranted to stop anybody from crying if they would only take it down properly, and a crust of bread and cheese was also given them at the old lady’s request, who thought the ale might fall a little cold upon an elderly inside without some food at the same time.

Then Squire Brockman asked the two once more as to the reason of their distress, and Dame Marlow proceeded to tell him the whole story from first to last. She reminded him of his own advice that she should consult the Pig of Cheriton as to the best means of discovering the lost Ruth, and omitted no particular of all that had occurred since she had acted upon that advice, and made the attempt which had just terminated so disastrously. It took the poor old dame some little time to tell the story, breaking forth as she did from time to time into tears and sobs, upon each of which occasions Squire Brockman gravely replenished her glass of ale, and waited in silence until at last the story was brought to a conclusion.

‘Well,’ observed he, when the time had come for him to speak, ‘I cannot be sorry for the advice I gave, seeing that, at any rate, you now know where the lassie is. But you have certainly failed this time, and no wonder either, for it must be a mighty hard task for a woman to hold her tongue for an hour, and, to my thinking, Dame Marlow, you deserve no end of credit for managing to do so even as long as you did. But there’s one comfort, you will have another chance. In ten days’ time you will be able to try again.’

‘Deary me, Sir,’ replied Dame Marlow, ‘so I know I may try, but how be I ever to keep silence for two hours and them creatures going on a pulling of me about the whole blessed time? It bain’t no very easy task, Squire, no, really it bain’t; but I’ll try, though, that I will, for poor dear Ruth’s sake——’ And here the old woman again broke down, and was again revived by the comforting beverage.

While she was speaking, Squire Brockman appeared to ponder deeply, and when she had finished he thus addressed her:—‘My good dame, you must not take on so. It is your duty to wear as cheerful a face as you can when you go back to poor Abraham. Show him you have done your best this time, and assure him that now you are up to the tricks of those with whom you have to deal, you feel confident of success upon the next occasion. Now I’ll tell you what to do. Go home and do your duty quietly for the next ten days. Don’t go running about and talking of all that has happened, for in all these matters, depend upon it no good comes of gossip. Then, when the ten days are over, come and try again, but before you go to the Temple pond, come here, say about four o’clock, and have a crust of bread and cheese and another glass of Beachborough ale, to comfort your heart and give you courage for the undertaking.’

‘Thank you kindly, Squire,’ replied the old woman, ‘that I will ; no fear of my forgetting of it.’

‘And as for you, Webb,’ continued the Squire, ‘I think you may as well keep away. The good dame is more likely to succeed if she knows she has only herself to rely on, and I should advise you not to come this side of the mount with her.’

With these words Squire Brockman dismissed his two visitors, who made the best of their way home without further delay. When she came near Saltwood green, poor old Dame Marlow once more had a hard battle with her tears, which rose fast and unbidden, as she thought how she had hoped to have returned

in a very different spirit, with the beloved child about to be restored to the arms of her longing father. However, she remembered Squire Brockman's speech, and as his advice had turned out to be so useful in one case, wisely considered that it might prove no less so in another. So she entered the cottage bravely, and went straight to Abraham.

He, poor man, had been full of hope and expectation of again seeing his darling child, and was, of course, not a little cast down by the unfavourable result of dame Marlow's expedition. But, being a good and just man, and knowing how terribly hard to any old woman had been the condition imposed upon the dame, he strove hard to conquer his emotion, or at least to smother the feelings of sorrow and despair which filled his heart. He said no unkind word, nor ever once reproached the old woman for her failure, but he shook his head sadly when she spoke of trying again.

'You may try,' he said, 'you may try, Betty, but 'twon't be no good. It bain't in the nature o' things for a petticoat to keep wist for one hour, let alone two. I shall never see my darling no more;' and the large tears trickled down his old cheeks as he spoke.

Dame Marlow cheered him up as well as she was able, and found that the very act of doing so gave her own heart fresh courage, and prevented her from brooding over their mutual grief as hopelessly as she had lately felt inclined to do. She daily busied herself about her household duties, scrupulously attended to the advice of the owner of Beachborough to avoid



all unnecessary gossip about the matter, and, in order to do so, made up her mind to stay within doors as much as possible. For, when the weather is warm and the days fine, there is no place so favourable for gossiping as a good old-fashioned village green, especially towards the close of the day. It is like a London club about a couple of hours before dinner-time, when loungers drop in to hear the last news, or still more, like the boudoir of certain fashionable ladies about the sacred hour of 'five o'clock tea.' So, in their more humble way, the village matrons come to their doors, saunter out upon the green, and have their quiet talk over the affairs of their little world.

This Dame Marlow carefully eschewed during the next few days, and saw fewer people and said fewer words, save to Abraham himself, than had probably been the case for many years. So the ten days dragged their length slowly along, until at last they came to an end, and Dame Marlow, according to the words of the Pig of Cheriton, had once more the opportunity of attempting the restoration of Ruth Mucklepat to her father and her home.

The very day after the expiration of the appointed time, the worthy old lady gathered up her courage and prepared for the attempt. She wished Abraham good-bye with trembling lips, and promised him that she would do all in her power to succeed this time, and that she felt hopeful and confident still. Abraham said little, but probably thought the more. He told her that no man, nor woman neither, could do

more than their best, and he was sure she would do *that* ; and with these words he bade her Godspeed.

Off trudged Dame Marlow upon her mission, accompanied by young Webb, as before, until they reached the high road before you enter the pasture through which you pass to get to Beachborough mount. Here Webb remained, according to Squire Brockman's advice, whilst his companion marched boldly forward, and reached Beachborough about four o'clock, as she had been directed. It was a lovely afternoon ; the mount looked bright as the patches of chalk, visible where the grass was thin, glistened in the sun ; there was a soft, pleasant breeze from the sea which rustled the leaves of the trees, and the air was full of the song of the birds and humming of the bees. Dame Marlow could not but feel cheerful under such influences, and very cheerful and happy she would have felt but for the one anxiety which was pressing upon her heart. However, she had nerved herself for the strife, and there was no halting or going back.

Remembering the invitation she had received, which, indeed, after her warm walk, she was little likely to forget, she walked up to the back door of Beachborough House, knocked and was admitted. She was shown into a room sometimes used as a library, the windows of which looked into the grassplot between the house and the stables. It was on the ground-floor, and had a small room opening out of it which faced the front of the house and the mount. In the larger room sat Squire Brockman, the walls being hung round on three sides with pictures of a

sporting character, which were, perhaps, quite as much esteemed by their owner as the massive folios and large octavo volumes which filled the bookcases which were let into the wall upon the fourth side.

Dame Marlow bobbed a curtsey as she entered the room, and the good Squire rose at once to receive her, and ordered in the cheese and ale at once. Of these the dame partook, nothing loth, and the Squire encouraged her to have a second glass. 'And now,' said he, ringing the bell, 'my housekeeper, Mother Nixon, has a specific which she thinks may be very useful in your case, if you would have no objection to try it.'

'Whatever you please, Squire,' said the dame; and immediately afterwards Dame Nixon entered, holding a plate in her hands over which a cloth had been thrown. The Squire then asked Dame Marlow to be so good as to turn her chair to the light and shut her eyes.

'You will not be hurt, dame, I promise you,' he said, 'and I am sure you will feel the benefit of the charm against magic with which we are about to provide you.'

Trusting to the Squire's words, Dame Marlow did as she was told, turned her chair and closed her eyes. Scarcely had she done so when the housekeeper clapped upon her mouth a huge adhesive plaster, which covered her lips and mouth completely and made it impossible for her to move either. It was done so quickly that the old woman had not even time to scream, and as she started up, Squire Brockman seized her by both arms and held her

where she was, whilst Mrs. Nixon pressed her hand firmly over her mouth, so as to give the plaster time to become firmly fixed.

'Don't struggle, dame,' calmly observed the Squire. 'This is quite necessary, and you will be the first to thank us afterwards for what we are doing. Without such a stopper as this over her mouth, no mortal woman could go through that which you have got to encounter. Keep silent for two hours? Not a bit of it! There, now I think you have a good chance of success!' So saying, he let go of her arms.

Dame Marlow, as she afterwards said, never felt so 'flabbergasted' in her life. Rage at being treated with such little ceremony, 'just as if she had been a child,' discomfort at being thus closely gagged and bandaged, and, at the same time, respect for the worthy Squire who had always been so kind, and anxiety as to the result of the trial she was about to undergo, all struggled within her breast, and not being able to find their vent in words, rendered her position anything but agreeable. However, there was no help for it. The Squire would never forgive her if she tore the plaster off then and there, and indeed this would not have been very easy of accomplishment, inasmuch as it was now firmly fixed upon her mouth.

And the Squire spoke again, even before her conflicting feelings had calmed themselves down. 'Think of your Ruth!' he said; 'think of your triumph in conquering those creatures who now keep her from you! Think of your joy, and her joy, when her old father sees her again! It will only be for two short hours. Bear it, good dame, bear it for Ruth's sake.'

Thus adjured, and having the cause in which she was engaged very close at heart, Dame Marlow strove to calm herself, and succeeded after a short struggle.

'Now,' said the Squire, 'it has chimed a quarter past four; go you straight through the stable-yard to the place for which you are bound, and we will remain here and hope that all will be well.'

Dame Marlow heard, and lost no time in following the directions just given, and never, I will venture to say, did mortal woman more eagerly desire the rapid passing by of time than did the good dame wish the next two hours to be over. She went out at the back door, passed through the stables and up towards the gully, and took her station at the head of the Temple pond precisely as the old clock chimed half-past four. All was still and quiet, and for full half an hour nothing whatever occurred to indicate the presence of anything unusual or supernatural. At five o'clock there appeared upon the water, not, as before, two, but some dozens of silver ducks, followed by golden geese and crystal swans in numbers. Then the birds flew by and screamed again, and then the strange fishes peered at her, and a large serpent reared itself up and hissed so near to her that she really felt inclined to sink into the earth with fright. But, at half-past five, she had not been provoked to speak so much as upon the previous occasion, and began to hope that she was going to have an easier time of it than she had expected. But exactly as the clock chimed the half-hour, out rushed from every quarter the little Pink creatures who had so plagued her before. This time, though, they did not tease her

upon her appearance, but, on the contrary, accosted her with the greatest civility.

‘Dear Mrs. Marlow,’ said one, ‘what a remarkably nice-looking old lady you are!’

‘Old!’ cried another, ‘I don’t call her old. Middle-aged, I should rather say—almost young, in fact!’

‘Do come into our house?’ asked a third. ‘It is so cool and jolly there, and, I say, there is some one there whom you know very well. Won’t you come? Oh, *do!*’

And the little beings joined in a chorus of entreaty to the old woman, who, whatever her inclination, could of course make no reply. ‘She don’t answer us!’ cried the Pink ladies. ‘She is cross, she is angry, she is sulky, she is unhappy. Why don’t she answer us?’

This went on for some little while, until the clock had chimed the quarter, and then suddenly appeared the Queen. Advancing quietly towards the old dame, she made a stately inclination of her head and spoke thus:—‘Worthy and excellent dame, I am afraid my children treated you somewhat roughly the other day. I was not made aware of it until some time after the event, or I would have interfered at once. I hope you were not hurt.’ She paused for a moment, and then continued: ‘I do not wonder at your silence after what has occurred, but pray excuse the levity of these little creatures. You are aware that we have a friend of yours staying with us; it is really a mistake to suppose she is there otherwise than with her own free will. I should be so glad if you could be induced to pay her a visit. Will nothing tempt you?’

Still the old woman remained silent, being, as we know, unable to open her mouth. 'It is not very civil to leave such an invitation without a single word of reply,' said the Queen; and then, stepping up close to Dame Marlow, she perceived for the first time the plaster which entirely covered her mouth. 'Ho! ho! what have we here?' she cried, in shrill and excited tones. 'That's not fair. It don't count. Oh no! *that* won't do. We shall soon see about *that*.' And, raising herself up on the tips of her toes, so as to bring her face as nearly as possible upon a level with Dame Marlow's chin, she solemnly uttered the following words:—

'By Powers of East, West, North, and South,  
Drop, thou speech-stopper, from that mouth.'

The good dame heard these words with much alarm, doubting but little that a power which could cause the marvellous things to appear which she had seen on and about the pond, could without much difficulty cause the removal of the plaster, and leave her once more open to the temptations and threats to which she would doubtless be immediately exposed. But no such result followed, and at that moment the stable clock chimed out the hour of six. The plaster was as firm as ever, although Dame Marlow fancied that it trembled upon her lips.

Then the Pink Queen stepped back, in surprise not unmingled with wrath. 'What is it,' she cried, 'that resists our power?' She clapped her hand to her head, nearly knocking off her crown in the action, and then suddenly exclaimed—'I have it! Oh, shame

that it should be so ! A Brockman is in the plot ! Never could mortal strength have fastened that speech-stopper so that it should remain in spite of my will, had not a Brockman had a hand in it ! Our own family against us !' she cried ; ' and now it will not drop off save with the wish and consent of her who wears it.'

The Queen spoke these words rather musingly, half-aloud, as if in a state of momentary reverie, and it was fortunate that Dame Marlow's ears were sharp enough to catch them, for they told her the secret of what followed, and gave her renewed courage and hope. Immediately after she had spoken, the Pink Queen stepped up again to the old woman, and began to speak in a wheedling and caressing tone. ' Dear Dame Marlow,' she cried, ' I am sure you are as kind and soft-hearted within as you are comely and respectable in outward appearance : you would not wish to do anyone an injury, and this you would do if you were suddenly to take your Ruth from us. She is now nursing a sick child, who loves her as if she were its own mother ; it will take no nourishment from any hand but hers. It suffers, poor thing, much and often, and her gentle touch alone can soothe its pain ; only her soft voice cheers its heart ; her kind words alone give it comfort. To take her away now would be to doom that young life, and from that, I know, your tender heart would shrink. Consent, then, that the maiden should stay with us for a week or two longer, and the little one's fate will by that time be decided.'

The Queen spoke so imploringly, and with such



a sweet voice, that if Dame Marlow had not overheard her recent speech, I question whether she would not have been inclined to believe her, and to yield to her entreaties. Fortunately, however, she now knew better than to do so, and only replied by a resolute shake of the head.

'You surely cannot mean to refuse me?' asked the Pink Queen. 'A life may depend upon your decision! Think again!' But the old dame made no further sign.

'Dear Mrs. Marlow!' once more began the other, 'if you only knew how I respect your firmness of character! It does you almost as much credit as the kindness of heart for which you are so famous. ('How does she know *that*?') thought the dame to herself, as the other continued): 'If you only knew how we all love Ruth, and how happy she is with us! If you really cannot spare her for so long a time, let us have her for *one* week longer. Will you not concede so much? Come with me and see her. Just come for a few moments. I promise you shall not be detained. Won't you come, dear dame?'

But the stout-hearted old woman remained perfectly quiet, and the Pink Queen once more changed her tack. 'Well,' she said, 'I see you require some further inducement, or perhaps you cannot tell me what you really mean, for I see that some one has prevented you from giving utterance to your opinions. It must be some one who is jealous of the wisdom with which you speak. But to what cruel treatment have you been subjected! *You*, a respectable lady of sufficient age and discretion to be thoroughly trusted;

*you* to be treated like a baby, or rather like an evil-speaker and slanderer, who must not be allowed to speak on account of the wicked and false words he would utter. I wonder you submitted to such a thing for a moment! Doubtless, however, it was by force, and against your will that it was done. Don't you wish me to take off from your mouth that detestable plaster? I will if you only wish it!

'Yes,' thought the old woman to herself, 'and, if you could, you would have it off whether I wish it or not;' and she all the more resolutely determined to wish quite in the contrary direction.

So, finding she could not prevail by these means, the Pink Queen tried others. 'Dame Marlow,' she said, 'now pray *do* think of what I am saying. If you will only wish me to take that nasty plaster off, you may afterwards ask me almost anything in reason which you can wish, and such is my respect and regard for you, that I will at once do it for you. If you like, I will give you six new gowns of the best stuff. Think of that! *Six* new gowns! one for each working day of the week, and a seventh for Sunday, if you desire it! Ay, and I will give you a *brän* new tea-caddy, and you shall find a chest of the best tea at your door to-morrow morning. And, now I think of it, there is a new bonnet just come home for me that will exactly suit Ruth. You shall have it for her, and a coat and leggings for Abraham, into the bargain. Only just wish me to take that plaster off, and tell me you will let Ruth stay one week longer with her dear friends of the Temple pond!'

Dame Marlow listened with unaffected surprise.

How great must be the power of anyone who could promise such magnificent presents! Seven new gowns! It was certainly the greatest temptation to which she had ever been exposed in her life; and, whether she accepted the offer or not, she could scarcely have refrained from making some remark upon it, if it had been in her power to do so. But she remembered her last visit to that place, and the yell of triumph which had followed her mistake, and moreover she had not forgotten the words uttered by the Pink Queen directly after her recent failure to remove the plaster.

And at that eventful moment, a quarter past six sounded from the stable clock. Then, all in a moment, the countenance of the fairy changed, and her eyes darted furious and malicious glances at the mortal before her. 'You vile and infamous old hag!' she cried; '*you* come here to insult and bully the Pink fairies and rob them of their lawful prey! *you* deceive the head of the family to which we have always been friendly, and induce him to aid you in your crafty designs! And what *are* you, pray? The scum of the earth—a miserable old peasant, who does not know her own tongue correctly! No wonder your friends have closed your mouth to prevent people from being pained by your vulgar ungrammatical speech. You wretch! You think you have conquered, do you? Not so. I will kill, kill, kill, *kill* you!' and her voice became louder at each 'kill,' till at the last one it terminated in a wild scream.

Not a foot moved the old dame, however, and the next moment the Pink Queen called out—'Come, my children, seize her and tear her to pieces!'

In an instant the Pink ladies from all sides rushed upon poor Dame Marlow, and began to prick, push, buffet, slap, tease, and torment her in every way you can imagine. They jumped upon her feet, which were tender, and not entirely free from corns: they nipped her arms sharply, they tickled her nose with a straw. In short there was nothing which elfin ingenuity could devise which they did not put in practice against the unfortunate old woman. But Dame Marlow stood firm as a rock, and, placing her arms akimbo, kept off her persecutors as well as she could, wishing all the time most vehemently that the plaster might keep its place. And so it did. The Pink Queen, as she very well knew, had no power whatever to kill either this or any other mortal unless by their own particular wish, and her words had been only uttered as an idle threat.

Still, the good dame had a disagreeable time of it for more than ten minutes, and then the Pink ladies suddenly ceased from their sport, and the Queen, coming forward again, threw herself on her knees before the old woman. 'You have conquered, dear dame,' she exclaimed, in a winning tone of voice; 'you are victorious and we are defeated! Let me, then, be the first to offer my congratulations, and let mine be the pleasure of taking that odious plaster from your mouth, now that its purpose has been accomplished. Say but the word, or rather, form but the wish, and it shall be gone in a moment!'

This speech was craftily worded, and might have been successful if spoken under different circumstances. But the stout old dame had been greatly irritated by

the late wanton attack upon her, and had only become more determined than ever to wish for exactly the contrary thing to that which her enemy desired. So she remained perfectly still, wishing in the right direction as hard as she could, and at that very moment, whilst the Pink Queen was still kneeling in anxious expectation of a favourable result, the great clock chimed out, clear and sweet, 'Half-past six!' Never was the sound of clock more grateful and pleasant to human ears, never was result more sudden and wonderful.

One long, deep, sad wail rang through the air, over the pond, and along the bank, seeming to end and die away at the old summer-house. The next moment every vestige of the Pink Queen and her people had passed away as totally and completely as if they had never existed, and the place had resumed its natural everyday appearance. But one feature was added to the scene which must not be omitted. Upon the bank, seated among the flowers, just at the spot where the ground had opened for her reception when she first visited the pond, sat Ruth Mucklepat, looking around her with a dazed and bewildered air. The next moment she had seen Dame Marlow, and without any delay or hesitation rushed at once into her arms. Strange it was to her that the good dame said never a word, and then she perceived the cause, and, amid sobs and kisses, tried to remove the plaster. Not a bit of it. So well had it been prepared and so skilfully put on, that no effort of Ruth's could remove it, and her attempts seemed only to pain her worthy relative.

Just then they observed some one waving a handkerchief to them near the stables, and seeing that it was Squire Brockman himself, they hurried towards him. 'What!' exclaimed the good man, 'is this the fairy wench, then? Welcome back, my dear;' and, unheeding her blushes, he forthwith bestowed upon her two good and friendly kisses, one on each cheek, a ceremony which he had not thought it necessary to go through with Dame Marlow. Then, observing that the latter still had the adhesive plaster on her mouth, he bade her come indoors, and ringing for Mrs. Nixon, desired her to take it off with some warm water, or with such other appliances as she possessed.

But, strange to say, the plaster refused to move, and the horrid thought came over the mind of the old dame, that she was certainly destined to be dumb for life, added to which infliction was the painful necessity of breathing only through her nose for the rest of her existence. She was terribly troubled at this, and scarcely less grieved was Ruth, who thought that she was in some measure responsible for the misfortune. Squire Brockman thought for a while, and then remarked that there was only one thing to be done—they must pay a visit to the Pig of Cheriton the very next day. The two women quite fell in with this idea, and took their homeward departure immediately, having heartily thanked the good Squire, Ruth in words, and Dame Marlow by such signs as she could make. Before they had passed Beachborough mount they met young Webb coming to meet them, in anxious trepidation as to the result of Dame Marlow's expedition.

I need hardly stop to say how delighted he was, or to describe all, or anything, that passed between him and his recovered Ruth. Nor need I dwell upon the scene which followed their arrival at the cottage on Saltwood green. Abraham Mucklepat's joy would not be easy to describe, but it may be noted that he began to mend rapidly from the moment of his daughter's return, and was out and about, as well as ever, within a week. All of them deeply deplored the misfortune which had befallen Dame Marlow, and Ruth insisted upon accompanying her in her visit to the Pig next day. Of course Webb went too, and indeed it was evident that he never meant to trust Ruth out of his sight again if he could avoid it.

Again the day was bright and fine, and the three people walked up in the afternoon to the chalk hills, Webb carrying a bag of good oatmeal which he felt sure would be acceptable to the wise one. So they journeyed on, and in good time reached the bottom of the hill, where Ruth desired Webb to stop, to which he at first somewhat demurred. But she reminded him of the success which had followed his obedience to Squire Brockman's advice on the previous day, and moreover bade him recollect that she would not be there herself but for Dame Marlow's kindness, devotion, and bravery; and that as the dame could not speak for herself, it was plainly her own duty to accompany her to the cave.

Of course Webb, like all men at that particular epoch of their existence, had to obey; so there he stayed, whilst the two women slowly ascended to the Pig's den, which they found exactly in the same posi-

tion as upon the occasion of Dame Marlow's previous visit. They both crept between the thickets at the entrance, and Ruth then declared their errand in the following words :—‘ Please sir, whoever and whatever you be, Mrs. Marlow have got me safe from the Pink fairies ; and many thanks to *you* for it, sir. And to do so she had to hold her tongue, as you said, two hours, and Squire Brockman put a plaster on her mouth, he did, and it stuck there all right, and there ain't no getting of it off now, and the poor old lady can't speak, no not never a word.’

She spoke, and almost immediately came in reply the same sound which Dame Marlow had heard, and presently afterwards the voice spoke and addressed the two inquirers :—

‘ Tho’ darkly might the Fairy lower,  
She could not move the plaster,  
Yet had she, for the moment, power  
To work thee some disaster.  
She willed the plaster there to stay,  
Whence *she* could not remove it,  
Her power was not quite ta’en away,  
And she resolved to prove it.  
Go ! wash in newest milk thy face,  
The plaster soon shall vanish ;  
That remedy will every trace  
Of thy misfortune banish.  
But, when thy tongue is free again,  
(Though it has rested lately),  
To save thy friends and neighbours pain,  
Don’t use it over greatly !  
For this I know, no matter how,  
A woman over wordy  
Men more detest than e’en the row  
Of roving hurdy-gurdy.



And though you talked in voice so loud  
You might be heard a mile hence,  
Less you'd be loved than she endowed  
With power to practise silence.'

Here the voice stopped, and Dame Marlow and Ruth were both exceedingly rejoiced at hearing how easy was the method by which the former was directed to get rid of her incumbrance. Of the latter part of the injunction, or rather the advice given therein, I doubt whether the old dame took much heed, for she must have felt conscious that, after an enforced silence of more than four and twenty hours, she would naturally have a great deal of leeway to make up in the matter of conversation. But Ruth laid that advice to heart, and if report speak true, never was woman more discreet of speech and careful with her tongue through life than she, owing doubtless to that never-to-be-forgotten visit to the wonderful Pig.

I said that the cure was easy, and so it would have been, if Dame Marlow and her relations had been in a position of life to command a ready supply of the particular liquid by means of which the obnoxious plaster was to be removed. As this was not the case, there might certainly have been some difficulty, if the ready wit of Ruth had not suggested that the same kind heart which had hitherto so keenly sympathised with them in their sorrow, and lent aid to extricate them from their troubles, would not fail to be equally ready to assist them now. Application must be made forthwith to Squire Brockman, and as it was now scarce half-past four (for the old dame had been anxious to get to the Pig's den as early as she

could hope for an audience), there would still be time to visit Beachborough that same evening.

They therefore descended the hill, rejoined young Webb, told him what had happened, and walked off at once in the direction of the mansion. They made such good use of their legs, that the clock struck five just as they approached the house, and at the same moment the Squire came riding in upon his old roan, about to take his early dinner.

'What ho!' cried he; 'have we here our fairy wench again, and Dame Marlow to boot? Hast been to the wise one, good dame, and what hope does he give of cure?' Then Ruth made her best curtsy, and told the tale.

'Is that all?' replied the Squire. 'Well, my cows have just been milked, I expect. Let the good old dame souse her head in a milk-pail at once, and good luck to her!'

Ruth thanked Squire Brockman for the permission, but did not exactly follow these directions. She obtained, however, a bowl of milk from the dairy-woman, and, having entered the housekeeper's room, proceeded to sponge her old relative's face, under the superintendence of Mrs. Nixon. Scarcely had the plaster been wetted by the milk than it fell off as if by magic, and Dame Marlow could speak as well as ever. To her praise be it said, that the first use she made of her lips was to give Ruth some real hearty kisses, such as she had been unable to bestow upon her before. Then she thanked Mrs. Nixon heartily for her help, and as the Squire came in, after putting his horse into a groom's hand, she began to

return her thanks to him so volubly that he put his hands over his ears, and ran laughing away into the library. Then Dame Marlow, Ruth, and young Webb set off upon their homeward walk, and I should be an untrue historian if I did not chronicle the fact that the released tongue of the worthy old woman hardly rested once during the walk. When they reached the cottage, Abraham received them gladly, but it must be confessed that his joy at seeing the stopper taken off Dame Marlow's mouth was considerably less than her own. It is unnecessary, however, that I should say more upon this point, or indeed that I should follow the history of this family further.

Those of my readers who wish to know everything that happened to all the personages I have mentioned during the rest of their lives, must inquire of somebody else. I know very little. Of course young Webb became the fortunate husband of Ruth Mucklepat, who made him an excellent wife, and never again walked by herself in places of doubtful repute. Equally of course Abraham and Dame Marlow both lived to a good old age, and always prospered after the events which are here related. Perhaps their prosperity was rendered more certain, as their happiness was undoubtedly increased, by the circumstance that Terrible Jackson never made his appearance in those parts again. Perhaps he thought he had killed Abraham outright; perhaps he found some place which he liked better to live in. At all events he disappeared from Saltwood green, and his sons soon followed him. This is really all I can tell,

though there is doubtless more to be told about all these people if I did but know it.

But I have only mentioned their curious history as one among many incidents which occurred in those ancient days, illustrative of the manner in which human beings were made the sport, and sometimes the victims of creatures whom our more advanced state of civilisation has now rendered comparatively harmless. Still, there may be bad as well as good fairies left, and the only way to avoid them is to keep in our breasts such pure and true hearts that they may not have the power, even if they have the will, to hurt us. For, however powerful the evil beings may be who come against us, there are those more powerful still who will ever aid and succour the true and the pure, and will gain for them even a more certain and more complete victory than was gained for Ruth under the wise advice and by means of the excellent counsel of the mighty Pig of Cheriton !

*THE MERMAID'S BOY.*

THE sea was in an unquiet state ; the wind was not very high, but there was enough of a breeze to agitate the surface of the deep, and it would by no means have been true to have called it calm. The large waves rose somewhat slowly, as if they had not quite made up their minds about rising at all, and then, towering up to a good height, fell heavily and sullenly forward upon the rocky beach, sending their foam and spray upwards in a cloud which it was beautiful to gaze upon from the cliffs above, for it was like myriads of drops of silver leaping and dancing up towards you in the bright rays which the sun cast down upon them. If the sun had gone in and let the wind have its own way, most likely it would have risen higher and higher, driven the thick clouds together over the sky, lashed the waves to fury, and excited a great storm for the very fun of the thing. Then the sea would have been really rough, though it was scarcely so as things were, and the sun seemed to have no intention of retiring at present.

Still there was what sailors call a 'good swell on,' and out away from the shore you could see the white foam on the top of the waves—'the white horses' as

they termed them on that coast—which betokened an uneasy passage for delicate people about to cross the ocean. Up and down the great ocean heaved, like the bosom of a sleeper who is troubled with unquiet dreams, and it seemed as if it was quite ready for a storm if the wind and the sun should so arrange matters between them. Apparently, the sailing men in that part of the world were of this opinion, for if you looked out from the high cliffs, there was not a ship or a fishing-smack to be seen upon the whole face of the ocean, and the place seemed to have been quite deserted, always supposing that shipping had been in the habit of resorting there at all. But of this one could not be certain, for it was a desolate coast, no dwellings or other signs of man to be seen upon it, and to all appearance a barren and uncultivated country.

Yes, the sea was neither quite calm or quite rough, although too nearly the latter to make one entirely easy about the fate of the only floating thing which could be seen upon it. Now borne high on the foaming crest of the waves, now deep down out of sight in the trough which they made as they surged up and down, one little boat was tossed to and fro by the dancing billows. It was a very little boat. So light and buoyant that it floated like a piece of cork upon the waves, which seemed to sport with it at pleasure and treat it as a plaything bestowed upon them for their amusement. It was rather a deep boat, too, and so well and tightly built that the waves must dash it very hard and very roughly against the rocks before they could break it, and this they did not seem in-

clined to do at present. So on floated the boat, guided, as it seemed, in no particular direction, steered by no pilot's hand, but driven hither and thither just as the waves pleased to take it. And down at the bottom of the boat, lying upon one large rug which had been turned over so as to partially cover it, was the sole passenger. It was a little child fast asleep.

In vain the wind blew, every now and then, more sharply than before, as if it was longing to have a little amusement with the clouds and waves; in vain the waves tossed the boat about as they laughed and bounded in the sunshine; the little child slumbered on as gently and peacefully as if it had been in its own tiny crib at the foot of its mother's bed. A very young child it seemed to be, not above two or three years old, with fair hair and a soft white skin, and one evidently of a class which you would rather expect to find in a well-ordered and well-attended nursery than in a frail craft in the middle of the open sea. There it lay, however, and there it slept, soundly and sweetly, and all the wind and waves could as yet do had no more effect upon its slumbers than the noise of a penny trumpet might have upon the ears of a deaf man.

But, gradually, as if they were tired of keeping the little boat all to themselves, the waves began to bring it in nearer and nearer to the shore. First they carried it into a great bay, and then towards several small islands which were dotted about in the same between the open ocean and the mainland. One of these islands was rather bigger than the rest, and had a number of rocks jutting out on that side of it which

was towards the ocean. Slowly but surely the waves guided the boat to this island, and presently drove it against one of the rocks, not very roughly, but with sufficient force to give it a pretty good jar. Then the child shook in his sleep and half awoke. But the waves at that moment carried the boat a little way back, and then lifting it forward again, drove it into a cleft between two low rocks with a great rush, and left it there, stuck so fast that it would take some time and trouble to set it free and float it again on the open billows.

Then the child woke up altogether. He opened his large blue eyes, shook back his light hair, and sat upright in the boat, wondering where he was, and what had become of all his friends. He was too young to know his own story, but he could quite well remember the nurses and playthings to which he had been used, and the beautiful, tender mother who had kissed him so fondly, and he could not for the life of him understand what had happened, and why he was all alone in such a strange, unusual place in the open air—a little boat for his nursery, rocks before him for his play-ground, the waves behind him dashing against the rocks and sending their spray over the boat, which they had deposited just out of the reach of their full strength. The little boy looked up and down and all around him, and then, not being aware of any other remedy for loneliness and distress, began to sob and cry, gently and softly at first, but presently as if his little heart would break.

He had not continued this amusement for many moments before he heard a low musical voice not far



from him saying, evidently to some other person, 'What is that?' to which another voice replied in the same sweet tones, 'Let us go and see;' and in another instant the child heard a sound as if of scrambling over the rocks. Looking up at once, he saw, bending forward over one of the rocks just at his right hand, two beautiful ladies. Their faces were lovely, their eyes large and tender, their long black hair streamed luxuriantly over their shoulders, and their exquisitely moulded arms had no sleeves to incommode them in their action. They were both looking down at the boat, and as soon as they saw what it contained, they cried out together at the same time, 'Oh, what a lovely child!' and climbed at once further on to the rock to have a closer look at him.

As they did so, the child perceived that, beautifully shaped as these ladies were, each of their bodies ended in the scales and tail of a large fish, and, had he been a little older, he would have known from this that they were neither more nor less than mermaids. As, however, his age was too young to permit of his being acquainted with such things, he scarcely regarded their tails (which, indeed, he only saw for a moment), and thought that they were ladies like his own mother, only, if possible, even more beautiful. And, being friendless and alone, his little heart beat warmly towards those whom he imagined to be creatures of his own race, and he stretched out his little arms lovingly towards them, and murmured in artless tones the words, 'Bertie cold—come to Bertie.'

As he spoke, the mermaids clapped their hands for joy. 'A mortal child! a mortal child!' they cried;

'and what a sweet little darling!' And both of them clambered forthwith over the rock and came down to the boat. Then they took the child in their arms, and fondled and petted him just as if they had been real ladies. To this the child was not averse, though he shuddered rather when one of their tails happened to touch him. But he was a sensible child, and the mermaids were so kind to him that he felt very sure he had fallen into good hands, and therefore made himself as comfortable as possible.

All of a sudden, however, one of the two looked at her companion and remarked, 'We must tell the others!' And almost before the child had looked round, both of them leaped over the side of the boat on to the rock, and plunged down into the sea. The child gazed with astonishment upon their disappearing forms, and felt greatly inclined to begin to cry and sob again, but before he had quite had time to do so, he heard a considerable splashing, accompanied by the sound of a perfect Babel of melodious voices, all talking at once. In another moment the place was alive with mermaids, fifteen or twenty of whom at least climbed upon the rocks, surrounded the boat, and broke out into different exclamations of surprise and joy at the sight of the mortal child who had so unexpectedly appeared amongst them.

Bertie (for so he had called himself, and this title we had therefore better adopt for him), looked upon his visitors with some astonishment, but he had at this moment something else to think of, for the pangs of hunger had begun to assail him, and he shortly expressed that fact to his new friends in his childish

language, but in a manner sufficiently intelligible to make them understand. Upon this the mermaids held a brief consultation together, after which they presently lifted the child with great care out of the boat, having previously wrapped him in his rug with the greatest tenderness. They carried him over the rocks and a short distance along the shore of the island, and then turned into an enormous cave, the mouth of which was close on to the sea. This was, in fact, the land residence of the mermaids, and this they determined should be the child's new home for the future. It was very lovely to look at when you got inside, for the roof and sides were rugged with crags of rocks curiously thrown about by time or nature's hand, and they sparkled like crystal—perhaps they *were* crystal. Anyhow, to Bertie's eyes they seemed very bright and lovely. The floor was of smooth, hard sand, sparkling with dazzling light whenever the sun shone in upon it, and very pleasant to walk upon. It sloped upwards gradually towards the mouth of the cave, which was just so much above the level of the sea that the waves never broke in except when the tide was high and the sea very rough. Then, indeed, the entrance of the mermaids' palace would be full of spray and foam, and sometimes a larger wave than usual would manage to peep over the top of the ledge, and send some of his water tumbling headlong into the cave, so as to give a ducking to anyone who happened to be sitting near the entrance. But then, you know, it didn't much matter after all, because of course the mermaids did not care the least bit in the world for a ducking, and until they brought little Bertie there,

no one else but the mermaids had any business to be in the cave at all.

There were various shelves on the sides of the cave, on which the mermaids kept the large hollow shells out of which they drank their five o'clock tea, as also the combs for their hair, when they did not (as was often the case), carry them about with them, and other articles which belong to a mermaid's list of necessary furniture. Then, further in, were a number of seaweed beds strewn about, for mermaids, like other beings, sleep at times, and in order to do so are accustomed to assume a reclining posture. Dry seaweed is not of itself, you would suppose, a very comfortable material of which to form your bed, but then the inhabitants of the cave, who were in the habit of making long expeditions out to sea, had in some of them picked up a variety of silks, satins, and soft raiment of different descriptions which they found in wrecked ships, or perhaps, for aught I know, bought of mortals who were willing to sell, and with these they had covered the dried seaweed so as to make very soft and pleasant resting-places for their wearied limbs and tails.

Upon one of these the good mermaids softly laid the little Bertie, whilst they went to procure him some food. I am not very sure what that food was, but it was certainly something very nutritious for children: perhaps the milk of the sea-cow, perhaps not, but whatever it was, the boy's appetite was satisfied, and he began to smile upon his new friends. This seemed to please them mightily, and they nearly stifled him with the multitude and fondness of their caresses.

Then they thought that he had better go to sleep again, for the slumber he had had in the boat might not have been enough, and when people don't exactly know what to do with little children, they generally fancy that sleep is the best thing for them.

So they laid him again on the seaweed bed, and then the mermaid amongst them all who had the sweetest voice sang to him in tones most melodious, and at the same time so soothing that before she had gone on long he was once more sound asleep, dreaming the sweet dreams of childhood. When after some time he awoke, some of the mermaids were still watching him, whilst others had gone forth about their usual avocations: fishing, bathing, combing their hair, and enjoying themselves after the usual fashion of their race.

Bertie looked round as one dazed and astonished, not comprehending at first where he was, and the first word he uttered was 'Mamma!' The mermaids flew to him immediately, and treated him so tenderly and with such gentle kindness that his little heart was soon reassured, and he was ready to laugh and play with the pretty ladies. And from that time forth the mermaids adopted the lovely child as their own, and made for him a happy home in their ocean cave. His education was not wholly neglected, for, being conscientious people, and knowing how necessary it was that children should learn, they hired an ancient crab who lived hard by, to give the boy the necessary instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. The crab was very learned, and withal had a certain temper of his own which would stand no trifling, so

that Bertie was compelled to be diligent when at his lessons, and really made very fair progress for one of his years.

Then he received very useful lessons in geography from an old cod-fish, who had made many voyages and was a person of great experience. There was no one to teach him Greek and Latin, but that mattered less, as those languages, strange to say, were not commonly spoken in the countries where, if he ever left the cave, he was likely to dwell. There was happily, however, an oyster-bed hard by, in which French was the usual language of the 'natives,' and whenever Bertie could manage it he swallowed some of these, as the easiest manner of overcoming any difficulties in pronunciation.

So, altogether, he was not without instruction, and grew up with a greater amount of useful knowledge than you would have expected. This was the more creditable to his abilities and perseverance, inasmuch as no very great amount of time was devoted to his studies. The mermaids required a great deal of his company. In order that they might enjoy this without danger to the child, they began by teaching him to swim. At the very first, as the boy was somewhat timid about going into the sea, they would take him between two of their number, and support him whilst they swam and floated about. Then they would push him into the water from the edge of the cave, and immediately jump in after and dive under and around him, showing him how easy it was to keep afloat, and encouraging him to go bravely forward.

As Bertie had no tail, he was unable to perform

all the evolutions which the well-tailed ladies could go through, but by dint of courage and practice, he gradually became such an excellent swimmer and diver that few among mortal boys or men could have equalled him in either exercise. Then the mermaids would take him off with them on some of their expeditions, although of course they took care not to go so far out to sea but that he could manage to get back, with or without their aid. For, when he was tired, they would support him, and besides, they taught him to float so well that he could remain for a long time in the water without any trouble or exertion.

Sometimes they would sit on the rocks and get him to comb their hair for them, which was their great delight, for a mermaid's back hair is generally very long and thick, and occasionally gets entangled with seaweed and other things which they encounter in the sea, so as to require careful combing. As these ladies have no maids, but, excepting their Queen, are all equal and wait upon themselves, it is a great delight to them when they can get their hair combed for them by a mortal, and especially by one like Bertie, whom they had taught how to do it with much skill and care. Whilst thus employed, some of the other mermaids would sit by, singing in those sweet tones for which their race is so famous; and amongst other things, they taught Bertie to sing too, although his voice could never acquire the peculiarly low and melodious notes of his teachers.

Altogether, it will be allowed that the little boat which had been tossed upon the waves with its

precious burden might have drifted to a worse place than that to which they carried it, and that the child was not to be deemed entirely unfortunate as to the hands into which he fell. He grew to love the kind mermaids dearly, and they, on their part, certainly returned his affection with interest. The daily life which I have described went on for several years without interruption, and as my readers may perhaps find themselves able to believe, the child grew older, bigger, and stronger during that period. He must have been eight or nine years old when the occurrences took place which I am now about to relate.

One day Bertie observed the mermaids frequently whispering together, and noticed that their countenances wore an expression of sadness which was wholly unusual, and much unlike their generally light and happy disposition. He ventured timidly to enquire what was the matter, and whether anything unfortunate had happened, and was told first that it was not so, next that it was 'nothing to signify,' and thirdly that he was 'too young to understand.' As this naturally excited his curiosity to the highest pitch, he persecuted the mermaids with earnest entreaties, until one of them, who loved him so much that she could deny him nothing, consented to tell him the cause of their despondency.

'We live here,' she said, 'as you know by experience, in a free and happy manner. We bathe, we fish, we sing, and, in spite of all the reports which have been occasionally set afloat by envious and malicious people, do harm to nobody. Nevertheless, we are not without our enemies. Although you do not



know it, because it has never been necessary to mention the circumstance to you, the adjoining coast and country belong to the royal giant, King Grindlebuster. This tyrant, for such he is, like most of his kindred giants, has depopulated his country, partly by eating his subjects and partly by taxing them so heavily that they have been forced to emigrate to other lands. This, however, affects us but little, since we have never admitted ourselves to be the subjects of anyone but our own Queen, and pay taxes to nobody but her. And as to eating, the only giant who ever tried to eat a mermaid was comfortably choked by her tail, and no one in the present day would dream of attempting such a thing. Besides, old Grindlebuster has become a new character altogether. Since railways and telegraphs and steam ships have come into fashion, his education, like that of other giants, has improved, and he has abandoned the vulgar habit of devouring human beings, although his ideas as to taxing his subjects have by no means altered. But, although we pay no taxes and are not his subjects, he has always claimed as his own the islands upon the coast, and amongst others, this one upon which we usually sport, and in which is our cave. Whether, legally speaking, the cave really belongs to Grindlebuster or to our Queen would be difficult to say. Even if the island be his, the sea immediately around it is undoubtedly hers, and so is the sand, so are the rocks, so are the oyster-beds at the bottom of the sea. Now our cave being actually lower than the mainland, and constantly broken in upon by the waves of the sea, may be claimed by

either one power or the other, and it is doubtful, they say, to whom the law would give it. But as to the island, we have been content, for the sake of peace and quietness, to pay the giant-king a small yearly fish rent for it.

‘And now comes our trouble. Because we occupy the island and pay this rent, Grindlebuster considers that we are in some sort, if not actually, his subjects ; at all events part of the population of his kingdom. Struck by some of the newfangled ideas of the day, he has determined to take a census of his country, and has literally sent us out papers to fill up as inhabitants of this island. If we refuse, of course there will be trouble, for he is not a man to be turned from his purpose, therefore we are all of opinion that we should comply, especially as he makes no claim to tax us, but specifically waives any such right. But this horrid paper which we have received and are desired to fill up, requires that we should state our ages ! No mermaid was ever called upon to do such a thing before ! It is well known that ladies have *no* ages, and how can we ever bring ourselves to do such a disagreeable thing ? It is monstrous, frightful, horrible !’

In these words the mermaid told Bertie the reason of the trouble which had fallen upon the sisterhood, and burst into a flood of tears as she concluded her narration. The boy heard her with great attention, and fully sympathised with her sorrow, though at the same time it must be confessed that his childish intellect was unable entirely to comprehend the strong objection entertained by the ladies to telling their respective ages. It was enough for him, however,

that his friends and benefactors were distressed, and he was quite ready to mingle his tears with theirs.

When the mermaids found that the boy knew all about it, they spoke with him freely upon the subject, to which they attached much importance. Bertie was of course too young to be able to offer any advice, but earnestly expressed his wish that he could help them. After a great deal of consultation, they told him that they really believed he could be of service. They felt quite certain that if the king knew the true state of the case, he would not think of requiring from ladies that they should say how old they were. It was a direct temptation to them to say what was false (which no female ever likes to do unless compelled by circumstances over which she has no control), and at the same time racked and harrowed their most tender feelings. If circumstances had permitted, the mermaids would, they said, have sent a deputation of their own number to the royal giant, in order to explain the facts of the case, and obtain the withdrawal of the obnoxious census papers. But his palace was more than a mile inland, and it was well known to everybody that by mermaid and marine law, any mermaid who should on any pretence whatever be found more than a quarter of a mile from the sea, unless in a salt lake, was subject to the extreme penalty of having her tail cut off, boiled down, and given to the dolphins. Therefore, if their case was to be fairly represented to the great Grindlebuster, it would be necessary to choose some other messenger. Who so fit and proper for the purpose as the adopted child of the siren sisterhood? If Bertie was not afraid

to undertake it, they would give him every necessary instruction, and he should undertake the expedition on their behalf.

The child readily consented to the proposal, and expressed himself willing, nay, even desirous, to go anywhere or do anything for those who had done so much for him. I said that Bertie was now apparently between eight and nine, but I think he must really have been nearly a year older, and the hardy life which he had led on the rocks and in the sea had strengthened and developed the muscles of his little limbs so that he was as strong as many a boy several years older than himself. And since he had not been overworked with lessons at an early age, he had not only learned all the better those which he had to do, but his brain had had a chance of healthy, natural development which had been of the greatest service to him. Although simple and unaffected, as became a mermaids' companion, he was bright and clever, and had plenty of that common sense which is such a very valuable commodity to all those who happen to have their way to make in the world.

The mermaids were much pleased at the boy's ready acquiescence in their wishes, and forthwith began their preparations for his departure upon his embassy to the giant king. Since his sojourn with them his clothes had been somewhat neglected, but they immediately set themselves to work to remedy this misfortune. It is recorded of the ancient Irish hero that when

'Brian O'Linn had no breeches to wear,  
He sent for the tailor, who made him a pair,'

and it would have been desirable at this time if Bertie could have followed so illustrious an example. But since this was rendered impossible by the circumstance that no tailor lived in or near the place, he was obliged to be content with a species of dress which his fair companions manufactured for him out of some costly silks which they had once taken out of a wreck, and with which they really managed very well. For, although they were totally unacquainted with the fashion of the day as regarded wearing apparel, such is female taste and female talent in this respect, even among mermaids, that they really achieved quite a success, and turned out their little messenger very respectably clad.

Several of them then swam with him to the mainland, and saw him safe upon the shore. They accurately described to him the position of the giant's palace, and told him to proceed thither boldly and ask for an immediate audience, which would certainly be granted upon his stating from whom he came. He was to be very respectful to the monarch, but by no means cringing or suppliant, for he was to bear in mind that the mermaids did not admit the giant's sovereignty over them, and he must do nothing to give countenance to any idea that they did. It was not likely that mischief would be attempted against him, or magic employed for his annoyance, but if by chance he *did* find himself in any unpleasant scrape, he was to be sure and remember to say the following words as distinctly as circumstances would permit :

‘ Friendly fishes of the sea,  
Send your mighty aid to me ! ’

whereupon he would certainly not be left without succour long. Thus admonished, the boy tenderly kissed the mermaids who had accompanied him to land, wished them all 'good-bye' for the present, and marched gaily forward. Upon the beach which he had to traverse huge boulders of rock were scattered here and there, as if thrown down by a mighty hand at some remote period of time, when the world was probably peopled with monsters who threw about such playthings instead of ordinary stones. Between these Bertie made his way to the foot of the cliffs, up the face of which wound a steep path, rudely cut out in the chalk, which gradually led him to the summit. From hence there was a lovely view of the bay at his feet, the mermaids' island near at hand amid the others of the clustering group, and the glorious blue ocean sparkling in the distance.

Right and left were craggy rocks stretching along the shore, and forming a natural fortress which might defy the landing of a hostile force in that country. But when Bertie turned his back upon the sea and faced inland, a different scene met his eye. The ground sloped gradually down towards a kind of plain, on which were dotted a few trees of the fir tribe, and little else besides ; but on the further side of this plain were a number of large stone pines, and through them Bertie could see the outline of an immense building, which, from the description that the mermaids had given him, he knew at a glance to be the palace of the giant-king. The boy at once shaped his course towards this building, full of the errand on which he had come, and anxious to do his duty to those who had sent him.

He pressed onward, therefore, and as he did so, could not help observing the squalid and barren aspect of the country. He saw no peasants or fishermen, or other living mortals, nor could he discover any traces of human life, save here and there some vestiges of buildings, apparently cottages, which had long since been pulled down and destroyed. No dogs barked, no birds sang ; all was still and silent, and you could tell at a glance that you were in a country from which despotic power had crushed out the youth and vitality, and where nature herself seemed to groan under the hand of an oppressive tyranny.

I don't know that Bertie's thoughts took exactly this shape, for he was hardly old enough to know very much about such things, but at all events he felt the very air dull and oppressive, and knew well enough that the place was not in the hands of people who made everything as pleasant and lively as the mermaids. On he went across the plain, until he reached the tall trees on the other side, and here at last he perceived signs that the country was not entirely uninhabited. A gigantic negro with a huge turban upon his head, suddenly galloped from out of a thick belt of the trees, and rode an Arab steed up towards the boy, who walked on quietly just the same. The negro was, like others of his race have been before him, exceedingly ugly, and as Bertie had never seen any person of the kind before, he might have been excused if he had been somewhat alarmed at the sight. He felt, however, not the slightest fear, but calmly faced the negro with a sweet smile, as he rode swiftly up, checked his fiery steed close to the boy,

and roughly demanded who he was and what he wanted.

Bertie told him at once that he was an ambassador from the mermaids, and desired an interview with King Grindlbuster. The negro looked at him savagely, and gnashed his teeth in a manner which by no means improved his appearance. 'Time was, my young chicken,' he observed, with a grin which was far from prepossessing, 'when you would have had an audience somewhat quicker than you might have liked. You are just the tender morsel the old king would have liked before he gave up all his good old customs and took to beef and mutton. Dash those School Boards! 'Tis they which have done it—they and the railroads have turned everything topsy-turvy now, and babies like you can walk about in a giant's country as if it was your own. Oh yes! he'll see you fast enough. Follow me!'

Bertie obeyed, thinking as he did so how fortunate it was that the giant had really given up those 'old customs,' which would otherwise have made his embassy one of no inconsiderable peril to himself. As they passed through the stone pines towards the palace, the boy perceived sundry guards idling about, all of whom had swarthy complexions, and wore turbans on their heads. No one took any notice of him and his companion, and they advanced to the great gates of the palace, at which the negro gave three blows with the back of the battle-axe which he carried by his side. Then the doors swung open, and they found themselves in a court paved with alternate slabs of black and white marble, which they crossed, and



came to the door of the palace itself. At this door stood two tall, dark, hideous men, one on each side of it, dressed in Oriental costume, who spoke not a word as they approached. The child wondered at this, but on their obeying a sign which the negro made them, he looked more closely, and perceived that their tongues had been cut out, which satisfactorily accounted for their silence.

At the command of the negro these unfortunate creatures threw open the door, and Bertie entered with his companion. They found themselves in a moderate sized hall, in which were a number of soldiers, keeping guard, as it appeared, in the anteroom of their sovereign. Several officers were present, one of whom stepped up to the negro, and, on learning his errand, went up to a door at the other side of the room, and spoke in a low tone of voice through a grating to some one on the other side. Then he turned to Bertie. 'You must be searched,' he said, 'to see that you have no weapon about you ;' to which Bertie readily submitted, though with some surprise, for he was not used to courts, and did not know the terror which tyrants have of assassination. Presently, when this formality had been gone through, the door was opened, and the negro conducted the boy into the presence of the mighty Grindlbuster.

The giant-king was seated cross-legged upon a huge ottoman on the other side of the room, smoking a pipe of wondrous size, and having by his side a can of liquor, with which he moistened his lips from time to time. He seemed to be a man of about sixty years of age, as far as Bertie could tell, but then the appear-

ance of giants is so deceptive, that he might just as well have been six hundred. He was not exactly a handsome man to look at. His hair was black, short, and grizzly ; his nose was rather of a snub sort ; his eyes were large and staring ; his brow lowering ; his mouth wide ; his chin heavy, and the expression of his countenance betokened a love of selfish indulgence, and was unrelieved by any overpowering display of intellect. Such was the potentate upon whom Bertie gazed, and before whom he had to plead the cause of the mermaids.

As he entered the room, Grindlebuster took his pipe out of his mouth and gazed at the new comer. For a moment he spoke not, but then, addressing the negro, 'Mahomet,' he said, 'whence comes this dainty youth, and wherefore hast thou brought him into our presence ?'

The negro answered, with a respectful obeisance, that the lad claimed to be an ambassador, and that as such he had brought him.

At these words the giant smiled, and then stared placidly at the boy for some moments without speaking. 'Thou art full young for thine office, methinks,' he said at length ; 'but the world changes as it grows older, and chickens do now what was once the duty of the oldest fowl in the yard. Well, young Hop-o'-my-thumb, what is thine errand ?'

'Sire,' answered Bertie, with a respectful bow, 'I come from the mermaids of the rock, your majesty's loving friends——'

'*And* subjects,' interposed the giant, hastily ; 'they *must* be my subjects, you know, if they live on my land.'

'They do not allow the claim, sire,' returned Bertie, 'forasmuch as mermaids have never been subject to other than their own Queen, but they wish well to your majesty nevertheless.'

'That's all batter-pudding and blackberry-jam!' cried the king, wrathfully. 'They *are* my subjects, and they know it. Who are you, to deny it, I should like to know?'

'Sire,' returned the boy, calmly, 'I only do the bidding of those who sent me, and know nothing of these matters otherwise. I live with the mermaids on the rock, and——'

'Then *you* are my subject too, young tenderskin!' shouted the giant. 'A pretty pass things are come to, when subjects send another subject to their king and call him an ambassador. You young villain, don't you know that boys have been eaten—I mean' (he said, correcting himself hastily), 'have been whipped, for less!'

To this outbreak Bertie thought it best to make no reply for the moment, but presently he ventured to observe: 'Sire, I was not born on the island, but am only staying there, and cannot therefore be your subject. But will you not allow me to state my errand?'

'Well,' remarked the other, 'I suppose we may as well hear it; though, mind you, the mermaids *are* my subjects, whatever they may say, and I don't feel sure that you yourself are not in the same boat.'

As soon as King Grindlebuster had finished speaking, Bertie thought he had better lose no more time, but state to the giant, without further delay, the errand upon which he had come, and the request of his friends

the mermaids. He accordingly did so, as clearly and concisely as he was able, and explained the whole business to the royal personage before him.

Scarcely had he finished, when the latter broke out into something between a roar and a laugh. 'I thought so!' he cried out; 'that's just the question! *Are* they my subjects, or are they ain't? If they are, why are these old maids to be let off telling their ages more than any other women in my dominions? If they are *not*, of course that settles the question. But they are! they are! I know it. Ha! ha! Don't like to say how old they are! Stupid fools! just like women!' Then he laughed again, and then a sudden thought seemed to strike him. 'I'll tell you what,' he said, 'if the jades will formally acknowledge me to be their sovereign, I'll let them off the census; not unless. Go you, boy, and tell them that!'

Bertie again made a respectful bow. 'Sire,' he replied, 'such a proceeding would be entirely useless. I know that the mermaids will never acknowledge any sovereignty but that of their own Queen, and they especially enjoined me to compromise them in no degree upon this point.'

'Slave! varlet! chicken! baby! fool!' cried the giant at these words; 'dost thou dare to say that any proceeding suggested by me would be useless? I will give thee time to think it over, at all events!' And so saying he bade his guards seize the boy, and imprison him till further orders.

The mermaids had told Bertie that the person of an ambassador was sacred, of which fact he endeavoured to remind the giant-king, but the latter paid

no attention to his remonstrances, and only stormed the more, vowing that subjects had no right to send ambassadors at all, and that he consequently had no claim whatever to the title. So poor Bertie was obliged to submit, and was hurried off by the guards to a place of confinement. This was a small room, the windows of which looked out upon the stone pines which stood between the palace and the arid plain which the boy had so lately crossed. These, however, were closely guarded by iron bars, which would rather have impeded the view (if there had been any worth speaking of), and quite prevented the possibility of escape. But the boy had no thoughts of escape at present. He could not help hoping that when the giant-king should have become somewhat more calm, he would repent of his hastiness, and be ready to consider with a more favourable ear the petition addressed to him by the mermaids.

He therefore sat down upon the only chair which his room contained, and waited patiently to see what would happen next. For some time he was left perfectly alone, and then a loud tapping at the door announced a visitor, and there entered a dwarf, with only one eye, and of an aspect the most repulsive which it had yet been Bertie's fortune to behold. Walking close up to the boy, he began by making a hideous face at him, and then spoke in a voice which was as harsh and grating as his words were disagreeable. 'I'm the torturer,' he said, which, by the way, was not of itself a reassuring announcement. 'In the good old times,' continued the dwarf, 'I sometimes cooked the prisoners, when they were young and tender.

*You* are young and tender ; I should like to cook *you*.' And here he put forth a long arm, and with his lean, bony hand, began to feel the boy's limbs and body as if he had been a prize ox. 'Ah !' he said presently, with a long-drawn sigh, 'you would have made a famous dish. Just in the right condition, plump, but not over-fat ; perhaps not *quite* fat enough ; but a week's care would have set *that* right. But everything is changed now, and the good old times are gone. Alas, alas ! But,' continued the old rascal, brightening up as he spoke, 'I may have the torturing of you yet ! I heard old Grindlebuster in a passion, and when he is in a passion with a prisoner, he sometimes hands him over to me. Shouldn't I like to have the charge of you ! I'd nip ye, I'd pull your hairs out, and torture every limb in your body until you had reason to remember the dwarf Cradblock !'

During these remarks, which were by no means amusing, Bertie maintained a profound silence, but when they were concluded, he gravely remarked to the little man, 'I am not aware, sir, that I have ever injured *you*. Whence, then, this spite against me ?'

'Because,' replied the dwarf, with a hideous grin, 'you are young, and fair, and goodly to look upon, whilst I am old, and hardly so well-favoured as I could wish. I'll spoil your beauty for you, though, if I get the chance !' and he shook his fist in the boy's face with a malicious glare.

'But,' said Bertie, 'you are probably not aware that I am the ambassador of the mermaids, and that any injury done to me would be entirely contrary to the law of nations.'

'Law of fiddlestick!' returned the other. 'Do you suppose our master cares one jot for the law of nations or for anything else? And as for your mermaids, skin 'em, whip 'em, hang 'em up to dry! I hate the lot of 'em; a set of wailing, howling, scaly-tailed humbugs! I've no patience with 'em! I wish I had the torturing of 'em, that's all!'

As this appeared to be the general desire of the little wretch with regard to everybody, Bertie thought it hardly worth while to make any reply, though he really began to doubt seriously whether his position as an ambassador would really afford him the protection he had been led to expect.

At this moment the door opened, and two guards appeared who had orders to conduct the boy once more to the presence of the giant-king. As soon as Grindlebuster saw him again, he burst into a roar, as if he thought he could thereby terrify his prisoner, who, however, being of a temperament naturally brave, waited calmly until he had done roaring, and then listened respectfully to his remarks. 'Well, you young imp,' he shouted, 'have you thought over the matter of which we lately spoke? Art thou ready to go and bear our message to the mermaids, and enforce our will by such arguments as thou hast at thy command?'

'Sire,' answered the boy, 'I will readily go with the message. But I cannot deceive you. I know the answer already, and I cannot use arguments which would make the mermaids alter their views on the subject.'

'Dost bandy words with me, stripling?' shouted

the enraged monarch. 'The mermaids did ill to choose such a malapert messenger. Wilt thou do my bidding or no?'

'I can but carry the message, sire,' replied Bertie, 'and again I claim to be respected as an ambassador.'

Then Grindlebuster broke out in great fury. 'I'll respect thee!' he cried, 'and thou shalt soon find out how such puny ambassadors are fitly served. Give him to the dwarf!'

As these words were uttered, poor Bertie heard a fiendish chuckle almost in his ear, and looking round, perceived the little man who had so recently been his visitor, standing close behind him.

'Oho!' cried the giant-king, 'art thou there, worthy Cradblock? Take this young fool and deal with him until he comes to his senses.'

'That will I do right willingly, royal master,' answered the dwarf; and, laying his hand upon Bertie's shoulder in a seemingly affectionate manner, 'Come along with me, dear little man,' he said, in a kindly tone; 'come along with me, and see old Cradblock's playthings for children.'

One more appeal the boy tried to make to the giant, but the latter would hear nothing, and commanded the guards to stop that babbler's tongue and hand him over to the dwarf. Finding that he was not allowed to speak, and that resistance would be vain, Bertie quietly followed the dwarf, who conducted him to a different apartment from that in which he had previously been confined. It was a long, low room, with iron hooks in the ceiling, from which ropes and chains were hung, with several curiously fashioned



tables and chairs here and there, and with a number of strange and unpleasant-looking instruments upon a table in one corner, which looked very much as if they belonged to a dentist. As soon as they had arrived there, and the dwarf had shut the door, he began to dance round Bertie, snapping his fingers in his face, and chuckling with the greatest delight.

‘Now you’re mine,’ he shouted in the boy’s ears. ‘I’ve got you, and I’ll show you my playthings;’ and as he spoke he pointed to the instruments in the corner. ‘Oh, what fun we shall have together,’ he continued. ‘There are nippers there to draw your hairs out one by one. You won’t think much of it at first, but when I’ve pulled out about a dozen you’ll begin to understand the fun. Then there are nice teeth-drawers for you : all those teeth of yours have to come out, you know, in case you should ever have the toothache, poor child ! One by one we will have them out ; very slowly, so as not to make a toil of a pleasure. And then there are thumbscrews ; and there’s an iron chair which gradually heats when you are seated and strapped tight in it, and makes your skin so hot—so hot ! And there are ropes to hang you up by the feet, and scourges, and iron boots that screw on very tight and make your feet small, you know. Oh, such a *lot* of pretty playthings !’ And again the cruel little monster danced round the boy and laughed with delight.

Bertie hardly knew what to do. He remembered the words taught him by the mermaids, but was not anxious to make use of them until matters really came to a crisis. He hoped that, after all, the dwarf

might only be indulging in idle threats by way of a joke, and determined not to show any signs of fear if he could help it. So he said to the little man, 'I am sure, sir, you must be very clever, as I see you have so many instruments here. I pray you, however, to recollect that I am an ambassador, and that as such my person is sacred.'

At this the dwarf burst out into a roar of laughter.

'Oh, you monstrous ass!' he cried, 'are you still upon *that* tack? The idea tickles me, I confess; and by-the-bye, now I think of it, I'll tickle *you* by way of a beginning!'

So saying, he directed Bertie to sit down in what appeared to be an easy-chair, and as there was no valid reason to refuse, he accordingly did so. The chair instantly tilted up, and before Bertie knew where he was, he found his arms strapped to the side, and his legs also made fast to the chair, beyond which only his feet and ankles projected. Then the dwarf quietly proceeded to take off the boy's shoes and stockings, and producing a large feather, began to tickle the soles of his feet. In a very short time, Bertie felt an irresistible impulse to scratch his feet, but his position of course rendered this impossible; then he tried to draw his legs up, but neither could he do this, and gradually the sensation became very unpleasant.

Meanwhile, the dwarf went quietly on, talking and tickling at the same time. 'Isn't it nice?' he said. 'How jolly it must be for the ambassador to have his feet tickled. How the blood will be going up to the head soon; wouldn't it be nice to scratch

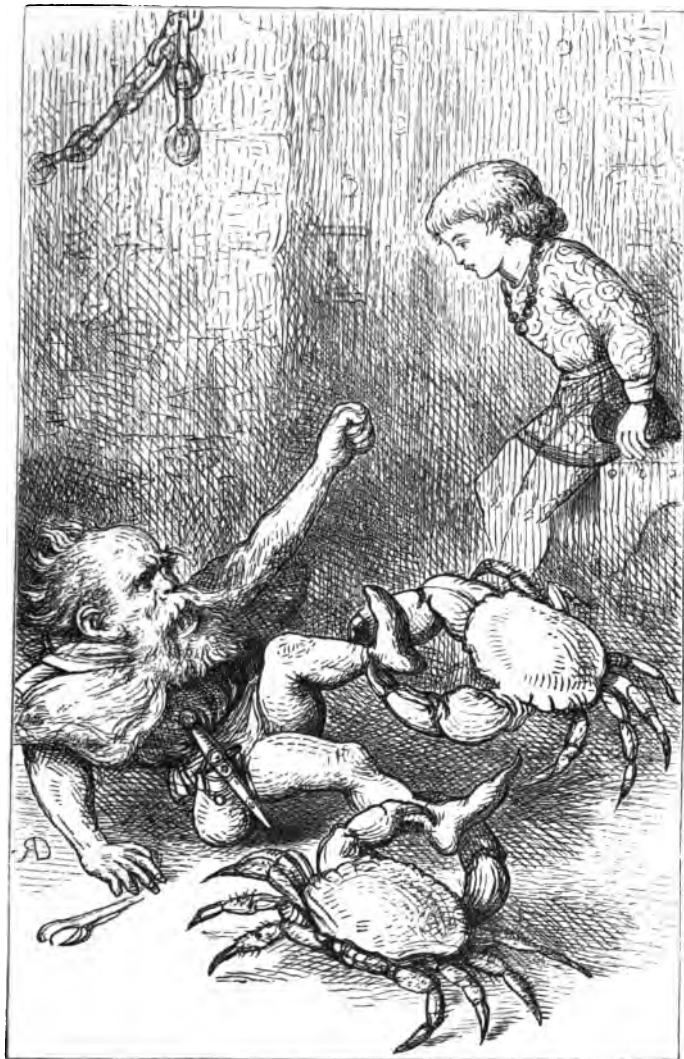
his feet now? But he can't move, poor fellow; dear me, dear me, what a pity!'

By these words the speaker did not render the boy's condition any the more pleasant. From being tiresome it became disagreeable, from being disagreeable it became painful, and from painful it presently became unendurable. Then, at last, when he could stand it no longer, Bertie suddenly shouted with a loud voice—

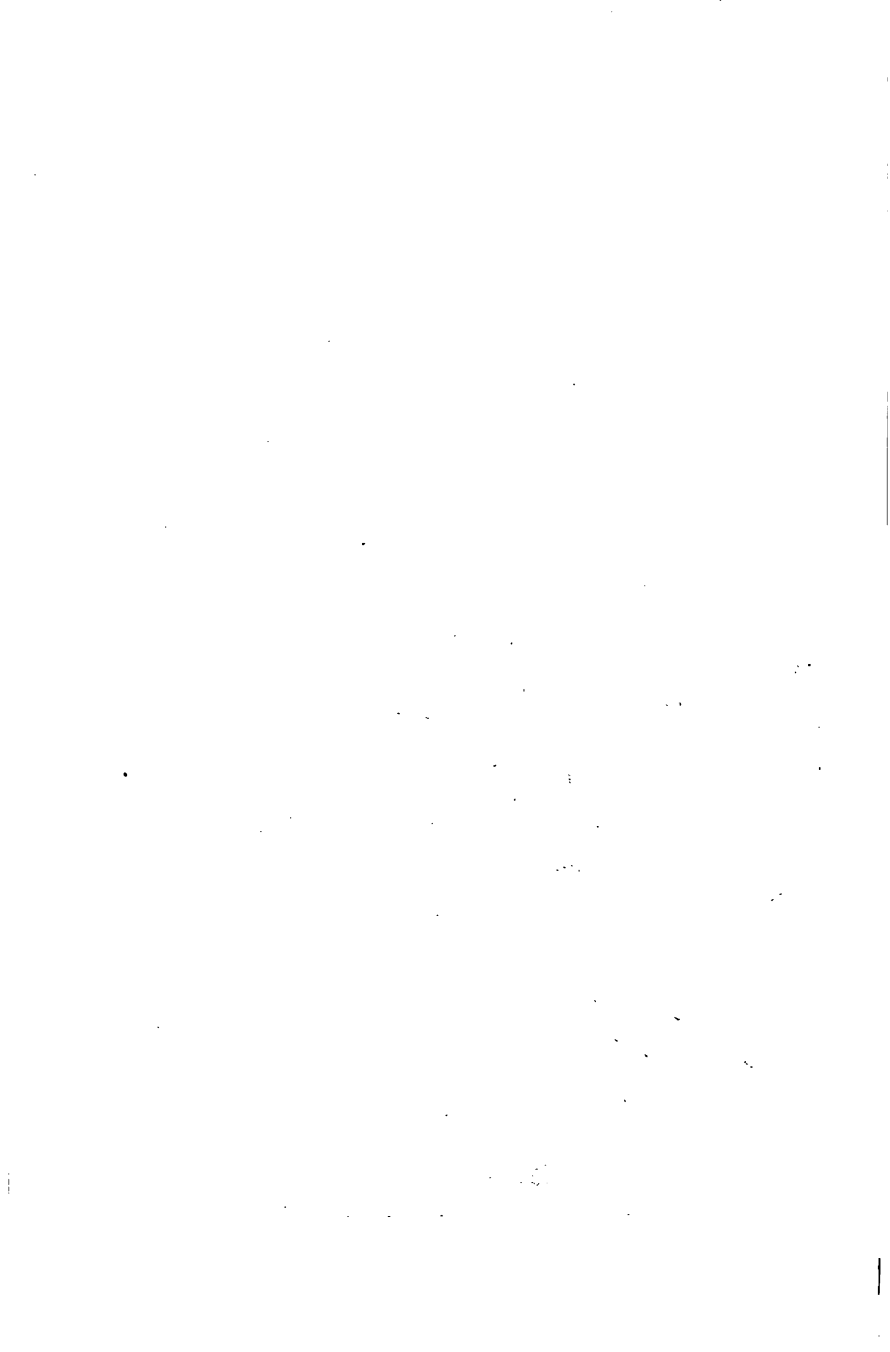
'Friendly fishes of the sea,  
Bring your mighty aid to me!'

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when, as if hurled by an invisible hand, a whole pailful of tiny little fish like sprats, flew, wet and dripping with salt water, into the dwarf's face as he knelt at Bertie's feet. They came with such force and weight that they knocked the little man right backwards on to the floor, and drenched him with salt water as they did so. The dwarf lay for a moment overcome with surprise, rage, and fright. Then, leaping to his feet in a fury, he yelled out at the top of his voice, 'You little brute, you shall pay for this!' and rushed upon Bertie with a violence which threatened to do the boy some serious injury.

But before the dwarf could touch him, or move one step from where he had fallen, two enormous crabs seized him, one by each ankle, and gripped him so tightly that he howled with pain, and burst into a fit of passionate tears. At the same moment Bertie felt the straps which bound him loosened by invisible hands, and immediately sat upright. His next act was to rub his feet violently, which speedily relieved



THE DWARF CRADBLOCK FINDS HIS MATCH



him from pain, after which he rose from the chair, and stood opposite the suffering and furious Cradblock.

'Take your beasts away,' howled the latter in agony; on which a closer nip from the crabs made him give vent to another shriek of anguish.

'I have no wish that you should be hurt,' said Bertie; and the words were no sooner out of his mouth than the crabs relaxed their hold, and the dwarf limped up to the nearest arm-chair and threw himself into it with another yell.

'I am lame for life!' he moaned out in a doleful voice; to which the boy thought it unnecessary to make any reply, but cordially thanked the crabs and small fish for their assistance.

He had scarcely expected any reply, but to his surprise, and probably also to that of the dwarf, one of the crabs answered in a guttural tone: 'Serve him right, for touching an ambassador. But if you don't want us any more, let us go back, for we have been out of the water long enough for our health. We will be here again in a moment, though, should you summon us.'

'Pray go,' said Bertie at once, 'and thank you kindly for coming.' Forthwith the crabs and small fish disappeared, and Bertie was once more left alone with the dwarf. The latter, however, troubled him no more, but presently arose, and muttering to himself in a low tone, scowled upon the boy, and slowly quitted the room, being scarcely able to set foot to the ground after the grip of the crabs.

Being thus left undisturbed for a little while, Bertie began to think over the position in which he

found himself, and to wonder what the end of the business would be. He felt much the happier, however, when he reflected upon the sudden and welcome aid which he had received from the crabs and sprats, showing that the words which the mermaids had told him to use were such as would in all probability preserve him from the dangers which had at one time appeared to threaten him. At the same time he saw no immediate prospect of obtaining from the giant-king the satisfactory reply which he desired to carry back to those who had sent him. Nor, indeed, did he very well know how to proceed in order to obtain any other reply than that which had already been given him.

As he thought (putting on his shoes and stockings at the same time), he looked round about the room in which he was, and shuddered at the sight of all the instruments of torture with which it was decorated. Whilst thus engaged, there came a sudden and authoritative knocking at the door, and directly afterwards it was thrown open for the admission of several guards, who appeared charged with a message from Grindlebuster that the prisoner should be conducted again to his presence. Bertie quietly followed the soldiers, and was again brought into the room where he had before had his audience. He found the giant seated on the same ottoman, and laughing loudly at the dwarf Cradblock, who stood by with his hideous visage distorted into a most disconsolate expression of woe, having evidently told his tale, and been much disappointed at finding it received by his master with no sign of sympathy, but with shouts of laughter at the misfortune which had befallen him.

'If you cannot manage a mere child, Master Dwarf,' he cried, 'we must soon appoint a new torturer.' And he roared with laughter again as he thought of the dwarf held like a vice by the crabs, and howling with pain. 'Ho! thou child of the mermaids,' he shouted, as Bertie was led towards him, 'hast thou discomfited the little Cradblock? Well done thou. But see to it that thou dost not try to play thy tricks upon us! We have more power than thou wottest of. We will question thee no more of thy matters, however, but put thee to a new test. Thou hast mastered the dwarf, now let us see how thou can'st deal with the magician. Ho there! call in Trickletif.'

At these words the guards instantly went out, and directly afterwards introduced a new actor upon the stage, in the shape of a monkey. This individual was of the usual size and appearance of monkeys, although his eyes glistened with more than natural brilliancy. He was clothed, however, in a peculiar manner, having a well-fitting red coat upon his back, and upon his legs a pair of light-coloured trousers, with shoes of polished leather and silver buckles upon his feet. He held in his hand a simple rod or stick, and advancing to the foot of the ottoman, bowed low before the giant-king, and then looking round, made a respectful obeisance also to Bertie, who returned it with proper courtesy.

Grindlebuster rather grunted at this, as if he thought the civility unnecessary, but as soon as the monkey had turned round and stood still, silently awaiting his orders, he thus addressed him: 'Wise and



illustrious Tricklelif, you have long been our adviser and counsellor in all matters of state, and we now ask you once more for your assistance. This youth comes from the mermaids, who, as you know, rent an island of ours, though they deny our sovereignty. These good ladies object to fill up our census papers, and to declare their ages, and have sent this child to ask us to withdraw the papers and dispense with their declaration. Of course we have refused their request, and had indeed handed over their impertinent messenger to the dwarf Cradblock. The latter, however, has been worsted in an encounter with certain fishes who seem to have taken the part of the child, and in this state of things we have sent for you, to ask your opinion in the matter.'

'Sire,' answered the monkey, with much gravity and deliberation, 'far be it from me to question or gainsay any decision at which your majesty may have arrived. But in such cases as these I think we are bound to consider not only the nature of the request itself, but the character and position of those who make it, and also that of the messenger whom they have selected to bear it to the foot of your throne. I do not venture to say more upon the request itself than that it is one which ladies are apt to make, and for which they must not be too harshly reprov'd. Then, the mermaids bear, I have been told, a good character, and not only would your majesty's rights of sovereignty over them be unaffected by your granting their request, but the very fact of their making it implies some sort of admission of your right upon their part. But, if I may venture to make the

remark, all this might, perhaps, be insufficient, were it not that the request deserves to be considered when presented to your majesty by a King's son.'

'A King's son!' cried the giant, as Tricketif pronounced these words. 'Is that, then, the rank of the messenger-child?'

'It is so, sire,' replied the monkey, with another low bow.

'Why did'st thou not tell us thy rank, thou mermaid-child?' asked Grindlbuster.

'Sire,' replied Bertie, 'I have told the truth about myself. I have been brought up by the mermaids, and I know no other friends or relatives.'

'Be that as it may,' rejoined the giant, 'it will not do for Kings to treat with contempt the requests which are made through the sons of their equals, and were I well assured that this was the case with thee, matters would be different. Never have you yet deceived me, Tricketif; what am I to think?'

'What your majesty pleases,' said the monkey; 'I have only told you what is the precise truth, although the royal boy may not know it himself. He is the son of a King, and of a very powerful King too, and if I was not forbidden to tell all I know by my magic arts, I could prove it to you in a short space of time. Tell me, young prince,' continued he, turning to Bertie, 'hast thou not a dark mark on thy left side, a bruise on the ankle of thy right foot, and generally a pain inside thee after eating unripe gooseberries?'

'The marks are as you state them to be,' replied the boy; 'and as for the pain, you see, there are no gooseberries in the mermaids' cave, nor do any grow

on the rocks, but I dare say the pain would come if I was to find any and eat them.'

'You may be very sure of it,' returned the magician. 'It is as I said, sire, and the youth before you is undoubtedly a king's son.'

'Then,' said Grindlebuster, 'I can only say that he must excuse me if I have treated him with any disrespect, since it was impossible for me to know who or what he was unless he told me.'

'Pray don't mention it, your majesty,' cried Bertie; 'it was doubtless a natural mistake, and I am none the worse for it. But pray, sir,' continued he, turning to the monkey-magician, 'do tell me how and where I can find my parents, and how it is that I have been separated from them so long. Tell me, kind sir, and I shall ever be grateful to you for your goodness.'

'That may not be, fair youth,' answered Tricketif, 'for if magic art were thus used, there would be no possibility of any secrets being kept all over the world. No, no, you will have to search wide and far, and to travel through many countries, before you can find your parents. It is useless to question me, for I cannot, I must not, tell you, though it pains me to refuse a youth of such goodly presence.'

Here there was a short pause, in the midst of which the harsh voice of Cradblock was heard saying with a sneer, '*He* a King's son! I don't believe it; coming here like a common servant of those wet, scaly sea-beasts. And if he is, he is no nearer to his home than he was before he knew it. Eh! King's son, where's your pa? where's your ma?' and the

little wretch pointed mockingly at Bertie, and made one of his worst faces at him.

But the luckless Cradblock had reckoned without his host. 'What!' shouted the giant, with a tremendous roar, 'dost thou insult royalty, miserable little imp, scum and outcast of humanity? Say, noble prince, wilt thou have him skinned alive, or only require him to be deprived of sight, and turned forth from the castle alone and unclothed?'

'I ask no punishment for the dwarf,' replied Bertie; 'he speaks but according to his nature, and perchance the pain of the crab's grip has hardly yet left him. I would have him pardoned, if so it please your majesty.'

'Not so,' returned Grindlebuster; 'never will I pardon a vile dwarf that dares to scoff at royalty as he has done, but since you are so good as to desire his pardon, he shall only be flogged three times round the riding-school with knotted cords, and go without his supper this evening.'

At these words the dwarf burst into a howl of anguish, but was immediately dragged off by the guards to receive his allotted punishment, and Bertie saw him no more. Then the giant-king made room for the boy on the ottoman beside him, and pressed him to smoke, which he wisely declined. Being, moreover, an honest and loyal boy, he did not forget those whose business he had come upon, and to whom he would owe it if he really turned out to be a prince, and should eventually find a royal home. Had he not come to the giant's palace he never would have heard of this chance, and but for the mermaids he

never *would* have come. So, taking advantage of the giant's evident friendliness, he presently said to him, 'I hope your majesty will not be offended with me, but I cannot forget that I owe the pleasure of making your acquaintance to my friends the mermaids, and I should really be glad if it suited your convenience to grant the request which I made on their behalf.'

'Nothing will please me more,' answered the giant, taking a long pull at his pipe as he spoke, and puffing out a whole volume of smoke afterwards. 'I don't care twopence about the census, to tell you the truth, and only send those papers out because it puts every old maid in the kingdom in such a fluster and flurry. Bless you! I don't want to know the mermaids' ages. Tell 'em to do as they like, and not bother me about the matter any more.'

Bertie was delighted with this successful result of his mission, and would have been glad to get away now as soon as he could, but for the not unnatural desire which he had to discover more about his parents. Once more he turned to the magician, and earnestly asked him whether he could give him no assistance whatever in the matter. The monkey sighed and said he would gladly do so if permitted by the rules of the order to which he belonged, but that it was strictly forbidden, and was therefore more than he dared to do. 'But,' said he, 'you are not without friends, noble prince, who will instruct you, and that willingly, as to the course which you had better pursue. Consult the crab and the codfish, who have hitherto taught you so well, and ask them as to the direction in which you should journey in search of your parents.'

This was all that Bertie could get out of the monkey, and accordingly he left off asking him questions, and, out of policy, made himself as agreeable as he could to the giant. The latter pressed him to stay and dine, which the boy thought he had better do, and was, indeed, not sorry to partake of some refreshment, after all the bodily and mental fatigue which he had undergone. The giant's table was not deficient either in quantity or quality, and Bertie got on remarkably well, so much so, indeed, that Grindlbuster jokingly remarked that, if he should fail to find his own father, he had better regard *him* as such, and come and take up his abode at the palace. To this Bertie made a civil answer, and behaved altogether in a pleasant and agreeable manner, although he was all the time dying of impatience to be off to the mermaids' cave and tell them the result of his mission and the strange news which he had heard.

After dinner the giant always had a smoke and a nap, at which times he did not care for company. Bertie therefore begged that he might be allowed to take his leave, as he knew there would be great anxiety felt upon the rock and in the cave on account of his prolonged absence. To this the king replied that he had hoped his royal kinsman (for to that length he had now got) would have stayed and passed one night at least in his palace, but that if he would promise to pay him another visit at some future time, he should certainly go that night, since he so much desired it. Accordingly, he ordered a troop of his guards to escort the boy, for whom he ordered a milk-

white steed to be brought round, and came to the courtyard to see him off.

As Bertie had never been on horseback before, he felt rather doubtful as to the success of his first attempt, and mounted his horse rather less cleverly than he could have wished to have done before so many spectators. Fortunately, however, it was the etiquette in that country for royal personages to ride always at a foot's pace, so that the common people might have a full opportunity of observing their nobility and greatness. Therefore, although the country of the giant-king had been so depopulated that there was nobody there to look on, the procession walked slowly and steadily across the plain between the palace and the cliff, and Bertie was in no danger of a fall from the quiet animal which he bestrode.

Arrived at the top of the cliff, he took leave of the guards, and descended without loss of time to the beach. As he approached the sea, whilst he was concealed by some of the huge boulders of rock which lay scattered about upon the beach, he heard the mermaids singing to the waves, or, in fact, to anybody who might like to hear them. At first he heard one of the younger ones trying her voice, and it seemed that she had fallen upon that sad style of semi-comic minstrelsy which is commonly said by the wise and learned upon such subjects to mark the decline of taste in our own modern days, but which has in reality at all times prevailed among a certain class. And these were the words which the boy heard as he stood for a moment behind a rock :

## 1.

'Oh list to my ditty—I cannot be witty—  
And am not desirous to be,  
I've never (more pity) been bred in a city,  
But live on a rock in the sea.

## 2.

'A mermaid so clever, myself I ne'er sever  
From bathing, amusement, and joy,  
But oh ! did you ever ? (I know you'll say never),  
We've lost our particular boy.

## 3.

'We're fond of him very ; he always was merry,  
And never spoke aught but the truth,  
Lips red as a berry, cheek sweet as a cherry,  
He was such a beautiful youth !

## 4.

'They asked for our ages, which always enrages  
A lady of fashion and air,  
So without gift or wages, this best of all pages  
Set out the small matter to square.

## 5.

'I wouldn't be "shirty"—but if I were thirty  
I'd follow our boy on his track.  
The giant so dirty has eaten our Bertie,  
Alas ! he will never come back !'

'Won't he, though?' cried the boy, suddenly stepping from behind the rock, and so startling the young mermaid that she gave a great scream and plunged at once into the sea. In another moment, however, she came up, radiant with smiles, and her companions



joined her in a cordial welcome to the boy, whom they assisted at once in the passage back to the rock and the cave. There they found the rest of the sisterhood assembled, eagerly longing to hear the result of their ambassador's mission.

When Bertie declared to them that the census papers would be forthwith withdrawn, there was a great clapping of hands and wagging of tails, and the boy was instantly embraced by all who could get at him, by way of congratulation upon his success in his first efforts in diplomacy. When he had informed his friends of all that had occurred concerning their own affair, Bertie told them that he had something else to speak about, upon which the mermaids were all attentive in a moment. Then he told them how that the giant-king had at his court a wonderful magician, who, having been called in upon their business, had saluted him as the son of a King, and had assured his master that such was really the case. He further told them all that had happened, and how he had been advised by the magician to travel in search of his parents, and to seek at the hands, or rather claws, of the crab, and at the fins of the cod-fish, instruction as to the best course he could take. He concluded by assuring the mermaids of his gratitude and affection towards them, and declared that he would be entirely guided in the matter by their wishes and advice.

They listened to him with mingled interest and astonishment, and could hardly believe that it was a King's son whom they had so long nurtured. But, since it appeared that this was the fact, one and all agreed that it was certainly his duty to obey the

suggestion of the monkey magician, and travel in search of his parents. It would indeed be a sad and miserable day for them, they said, when their pet, their darling, their own beautiful boy should leave them, but as it was for his own interest and advantage that he should do so, they would not only offer no obstacle, but do all in their power to assist him. The first thing to do was to consult with the old crab and the cod-fish, who were both very wise in their several ways. Each expressed the greatest surprise at being consulted, but alleged that their wonder was only caused by the discovery by the boy of a secret which *they* had known all along.

Bertie could not help thinking that, if this was really the case, it was rather unkind of them never to have given him one single hint of that which it had been so very desirable for him to know. However, he said nothing which might lead them to suspect that he harboured such a thought, but only expressed himself deeply grateful to them for the able tuition they had hitherto given him, and the kindness they had ever shown him. He went first to the crab, and adjured him by all he held dear to tell him as much as he dared tell. 'Crack my shell!' cried the old creature, 'if there is much that I can tell. You floated here in a boat—that we know, and so do the mermaids. You are a King's son—that *I* know, but the mermaids did not, until you told them you had heard so. Those two points we have to start from. Well, there's something more. If you are a King's son, there must have been a King—also, most likely, a Queen. So far so good. The next question is, Who are they? Then come

several more. Where did they live? Are they alive still? Where had you better look for them? All I can tell you is that they are alive, and that if you find them, they will certainly recognise you by the marks spoken of by the monkey. There, go along, and if all turns out well, don't forget how much you will owe to me.'

No doubt the crab meant well, but it must be admitted that Bertie turned away from him not without a certain feeling of disappointment, since he had in reality told him nothing that he did not perfectly well know, or fancy that he knew, before. So he went to the old cod-fish, told him all that had happened, and besought his advice.

'I'll do the best I can for you,' exclaimed the worthy old soul; 'may I be crimped if I don't! I cannot pretend that it is in my power to tell you precisely where your parents are to be found, but eat me with oyster sauce if I can't give you some hints that will be useful to you. When you are provided with a boat, sail out into the open sea as straight as you can. You will be sure to see a number of seagulls at the mouth of the bay, flitting about on the crest of the waves, which is one of their chief amusements. Watch them with interest, and, as they are conceited birds, they will come round about you to show off their dexterity in flying and skimming the waves. When one comes very near to you, say to him these words :

'Barley mew. Barley mew.  
Seagull, tell me what to do,  
Where to go and whither steer  
To regain my parents dear :  
Barley mew. Barley mew.  
Seagull, tell me what to do !'

That is all I can tell you at present, my dear boy, but if at any time during your travels you are in want of aid, remember the words which the mermaids taught you to say, and boil my head and shoulders if I don't either come myself to help you, or send some of my friends.'

Bertie was better satisfied with the cod's information and advice than with that which had been afforded him by the crab. He ought to have known, poor fellow, that he had done wrong to ask advice of the latter, as he did, when crouched in his natural condition in a hole in the rocks, for crabs are never of much service to any one until they are dressed, to which state his ancient predecessor had not at that time attained. Having obtained the advice and aid of the cod-fish, he now returned to the cave, and had a long consultation with the mermaids, which resulted in their fixing that day fortnight for his departure. A little boat had not long before drifted on to the rocks, and, as no one had claimed or was likely to claim it, it was thought that it could not be devoted to a better purpose than in taking Bertie upon his travels. Accordingly, the next few days were employed in fitting up the boat as comfortably as could be done with the means at the mermaids' command, and by the appointed time he was quite ready for the voyage.

Bertie could not, without regret, quit the cave which had so long been his happy home, or the beings who had so tenderly cared for him in the days of his childhood. He fondly caressed them as they hung weeping on his neck, and faithfully promised to return, whether his journey proved successful or not, and again revisit

the much-loved spot. Many of the mermaids swam by the boat for some distance after she had been launched, and accompanied the boy nearly to the open sea. Then they returned with heavy and sorrowful hearts to their homes, and bewailed the loss of the child who had become so dear to their loving hearts. He, meanwhile, having left his friends of the cave and rock, felt his heart beat high with hopes of the future, and determined to go boldly forward upon his journey, without thinking more than he could help of the safety and repose which he was leaving behind.

When he came well out into the mouth of the bay, he saw, as the old cod-fish had predicted, innumerable seagulls flying about in every direction. Remembering the instructions he had received, he immediately began to regard them with great apparent interest, although, in reality, excepting in so far as they might affect his own fate, he cared nothing about them, and had seen similar birds too often to feel the least curiosity in their proceedings. Evidently pleased with the attention he was bestowing upon them, the birds began to fly round and round the boat, every now and then giving utterance to a little scream, which you might take to express joy, surprise, or friendliness, whichever you pleased. Presently one flew quite close to Bertie's head, upon which he instantly repeated the words which the cod-fish had directed him to say.

'Barley mew. Barley mew.  
Seagull, tell me what to do,  
Where to go and whither steer  
To regain my parents dear :  
Barley mew. Barley mew.  
Seagull, tell me what to do !'

As soon as he had pronounced these words, the seagull turned and flew three times round the boy's head, croaking in a strange and unusual manner. Then it said :

'If your parents you wish to revisit,  
Lie down in your boat for to sleep,  
No difficult task it is—is it ?  
As you float on the waves of the deep.  
'Twas sleeping you came to the mermaids,  
Who've kept you so long at their cost ;  
'Tis sleeping your mother and *her* maids  
Should welcome the child they have lost.  
But if, ere you reach your fond mother,  
You wake up and venture to rise,  
You must journey on still for another  
Long year ere you gladden her eyes.'

'Well !' said Bertie, as the seagull, after uttering these words, flew off to join its companions in their circling flight, 'I never thought the task would be so easy as *that* ! It seems I've only got to lie down and go to sleep, and all will be right. I can do that without much trouble, and the sooner I set about it the better !' So saying, the boy arranged a comfortable seal-skin rug, which his friends had given him, in the bottom of the boat, laid himself down therein as comfortably as he could, and in a few minutes was fast asleep. The boat tossed to and fro on the gently heaving waves, just as it had done when it bore him, as a sleeping infant, to the mermaids' island ; the winds blew softly over the sea, the waves played with the little bark as with a toy, and still the boy slept the sweet sleep of childhood. The mermaids were thinking of him, and singing their songs of grief at his departure, in their own melodious tones ; the giant-king

was probably regretting that the prince to whom he had taken such a fancy had left him so soon. Was his mother still lamenting his loss? Did any secret voice whisper to her that her boy was coming, and tell her how near he was to her that day? I cannot tell, because nobody ever told me, but he was going, so I believe, straight to the land of his birth and the home of his parents, and a few hours more would make them all happy, and reunite him to those whose hope and comfort he had been at his birth, and whose misery at losing him may be more easily imagined than described.

He slept soundly, I say, and time wore on and on till he had floated for some considerable distance. Then some unexpected and curious current seemed to turn the boat from its straight course, and so it chanced that it came near to an island very different from that which the mermaids inhabited. Trees came down to the very sea, and much and dense foliage was to be seen further inland. And upon the island there dwelt living creatures, but very different from the mermaids. They were witchlings and elves of a wicked sort, servants of the great fairy Spitemalina, who, as we shall hereafter see, had no friendly feeling towards Bertie and his parents. She it was, no doubt, who managed that the strange and strong current should take the boat in the direction of the island, and she it was who had put the dwellers on the island up to mischief.

As the boat came nearer and nearer, a whole troop of little witchlings came running down to the shore, and danced with delight as they saw the success of the

trick which their mistress had played. Still, the boat, being only manned, so to speak, by an innocent child, could not quite touch that wicked shore, and so when it was about twenty yards short, it stopped in the still water. The witchlings did not dare wade in, and so they sent two of their tame porpoises, who came up close to the side of the boat, and made all the splashing they could in order to wake the boy. But he still slept on, calmly and happily, and heeded not the porpoises or their noise. Then they sent a dog-fish, who struck the bottom of the boat with his sword, and tried to break it, but without success, for it was too well and firmly built. And next they sent a huge skate, with a face for all the world like a baby's, and he managed to clamber up the side of the boat, just as all the witchlings together gave a shrill scream, which caused the boy to open his eyes.

The first thing he saw was the hideous face of the skate close to him, and, forgetful of everything else at that moment, he sprang suddenly to his feet, and shouted in a loud voice 'Who are you?' No sooner had he risen upright than the whole company of wicked creatures on the shore burst into a roar of laughter.

'Hurra! hurra!' they cried; 'he has broken the spell! He must travel! he must travel! He shan't see his ma for a year! Ha! ha!' and they flung themselves about into the oddest attitudes, standing on their heads, capering after the wildest fashion, and all the time pointing and jeering at the poor boy.

The moment he had spoken, Bertie remembered that he ought not to have done so, and that, according to the seagull, he would now have to wander about



for another year before he could hope to see his parents. He was so vexed at this that he felt almost inclined to cry, but remembering that this would only cause greater delight to his unexpectedly discovered enemies, bravely forbore to do so. 'Come on shore, boy, come on shore,' cried the people on the bank, for they knew that the boat could come if the boy wished it and tried to bring it there, and they also knew that if they once got him among them they would probably be able to detain him for a long time, if not for ever, by their witch-tricks.

But Bertie was too wise for this. 'Not if I know it,' replied he. 'You do not seem to be so decidedly friendly as to induce me to pay you a visit, so you must excuse me for not complying with your request.'

'But you must and *shall* come,' said a beautiful little witchling of about his own size, who stood, prettily attired in white muslin with a blue sash, just by the edge of the water. 'I want to dance with you, and I'm sure you can't be so rude as to refuse a lady.'

Bertie, however, still politely declined, upon which the witchlings shouted out with one accord that the porpoises should bring him, and those creatures immediately began to make a great splashing round the boat. Bertie was not aware of the limited extent of their power, but, whether it were great or small, he began to see that he should never go on safely upon his travels if left to his own unaided strength, so he lifted up his voice as loud as he could, and cried out the words which had before stood him in such good stead :—

'Friendly fishes of the sea,  
Bring your mighty aid to me.

The effect was instantaneous. A shoal of dolphins almost immediately charged through the clear water and compelled the porpoises to scuttle away in every direction. Then they gently turned the boat, and conducted it from the island out into the open sea, where they started it in another direction, and without a word left Bertie to himself. Now that he had time to think over what had passed, he was overwhelmed with grief at the thought that his own folly and neglect of the seagull's warning had delayed for a year that meeting with his parents which he so anxiously desired. As he thought, he blamed himself much more than I should be inclined to blame him, for I am sure that anybody, however he might have been cautioned beforehand, would have been extremely likely to jump up and ask what was the matter, if he were suddenly to be awakened, and should see the awful face of a skate grinning within a few inches of his face. But Bertie blamed himself bitterly, and being now alone, was not ashamed to burst into a flood of tears. At this moment he heard a little splash very near him, and looking over the side of the boat, beheld no less a person than the old cod-fish. 'Ah, my dear boy,' said the latter, 'I know what has happened, and how vexed you are with yourself for it. But let me advise you to cheer up and be of good heart. At your age one year can make no great difference, and it will soon be gone. Meanwhile I can help you now in a more material manner. Take this dried cuttle-fish, and keep it always by you. If any stranger accosts you, take the cuttle-fish in your hands and close your fingers upon it. If

the speaker be an enemy in disguise, it will remain cold and impassive, if he be a friend it will cause your fingers and hand to gently tingle, and if it chance that you are accosted by a relation, it will become so warm in your hand that you cannot be mistaken in the fact.'

Bertie thanked the old cod-fish kindly, and then asked where he was to go next. 'That,' replied the cod-fish, 'will be determined for you by others. Although you cannot see him, a dolphin is now swimming before your boat, which follows him like a needle does the magnet. He will take you to some country where you can land and seek your fortunes, and be sure you remember the advice I have given you, and the words by which you can summon friends to your aid if you should chance to need them.'

The boy heartily thanked the old fish, and having made himself as comfortable as he could in the boat, prepared to encounter whatever adventures might come in his way.

Now it is not my purpose to relate all that happened to our young hero during the next year. It was one of weary travel, for he visited many countries and saw a vast number of curious things. He came to one country where the people were a religious people, and had a church established by law, and supported by the land of the country. A great number of clergymen belonged to this church, and it was their duty to defend it against all enemies, and especially against those who thought there ought to be no church established by law. Instead of this, they all fell out among themselves, and were princi-

pally at loggerheads whether they ought to stand with their faces to the east or to the north at one particular part of their service, and they wrote and talked a great deal of nonsense, and quoted opinions on this point which had been given by people ages before, whom the great mass of their congregations had never heard of, and cared for still less. So the people were likely to slip away from them, and the enemies of the church chuckled and rubbed their hands to see its friends playing into their hands and behaving with such arrant folly. .

Then he visited another land, where a number of the women were anxious to be treated just as if they were men, and declared they were just as well able to govern the country as the men were, and that it was wrong and bad to prevent their doing so. Some of them tried to persuade Bertie that they were right, and talked to him for a long time on the subject. The boy so far agreed with them that he thought that a woman was as good as a man any day, and in some things much better, but until the nature and constitution of the two sexes had been so changed as to render each capable of performing the same duties and discharging the same functions, he could not help thinking that it was undesirable to alter that order of society which had existed in most, if not in all, nations of the world ever since its creation.

Many other curious things and wonderful people did Bertie see and visit, until month after month wore away, and the year had nearly come to an end. During this time he met with a great many adventures which it would take me too long to narrate, but, thanks

to the advice he had received and the attention which he paid to it, he came safely out of them all. He invariably carried the cuttle-fish about with him, and closed his hand upon it whenever a stranger addressed him. By this means he knew friends from enemies directly, and was thus enabled to steer clear of the latter. I do not believe that he had to call upon the 'friendly fishes of the sea' more than once, and that was when he came to a country in which the people who drank nothing but water wanted to make everybody else do the same, and got so furiously intoxicated at a meeting they had to promote that object, that they created a riot in which the boy was nearly destroyed.

Remembering in time, however, the words of magic power, he summoned to his aid a multitude of fishes, who gave the crowd such a quantity of their favourite liquor as drenched them to the skin and enabled Bertie to slip quietly away. This, and the occurrence of a Peace Society gathering at which the persons assembled advocated moral force as a way of terminating all strife, and themselves came to blows before the meeting broke up, were the only two occasions upon which Bertie stood in need of other assistance than his own wit. But as the close of the year drew near at hand, his heart began once more to beat high with hope. He was now between eleven and twelve, tall for his age, and as nice-looking a little fellow as you would wish to see. Would his mother recognise him? Should he be sure it was her? What was his father like? All these questions perplexed the boy vastly at times, and more than

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once he lay awake pondering over them, and longing for the moment when all his doubts should be solved. During the whole of his wanderings he had never lost his faithful boat, but always left it at some port as near as possible to the countries he visited, returning to it when he wished to go somewhere else.

The year had nearly passed away when he embarked once more, after a lengthy visit to an interesting country which so loved excitement that it changed its form of government repeatedly, and its own inhabitants were never perfectly certain, from one year to another, under what form they were being governed. The day was fine, a little breeze sprung up, and the boat went off merrily before it. Full of hope and expectation, Bertie looked forward over the sea with restless anxiety, and for many hours was still wakeful and watchful. At last, however, sleep slowly but certainly crept over his weary frame, his eyes became heavy, his head sank upon his breast, and his senses were steeped in forgetfulness. He could never tell how long he slumbered, but he was at length awakened by a terrible noise and outcry, as of persons fighting in the sea. This time our young friend forbore to rise, recollecting but too well the consequences of his sudden action on being roused from sleep upon a previous occasion. Nevertheless he raised his head so as to be able to see over the side of the boat, and thus became the witness of a fearful battle. A woman of tall stature and forbidding aspect, with wings upon her shoulders, and hair which was short and frizzled all over her head, was violently struggling in the water with another lady

whose long, beautiful hair would have afforded a good hold for her furious antagonist, had not her hands and arms been cleverly employed in defending it from her attacks. The countenance of the second lady was lovely to look upon, and there was an air of majesty about her of which you could not but be sensible, even as she plunged, writhed, dived, and twisted about in the water.

In some of these evolutions Bertie caught a glimpse which showed him that this was none other than a mermaid, and so indeed it was, whilst her adversary was neither more nor less than the great fairy Spitemalina. And this was the occasion of the struggle. The fairy, delighted with the success of her first stratagem, had seen with concern that Bertie had, during the year of trial, conducted himself well and cautiously, and avoided all the dangers and snares she had craftily thrown in his way. There appeared, therefore, every probability that at the end of the appointed time the boy would be restored to his parents, and the Queen whom she hated would once more clasp her darling child in her arms. To prevent the accomplishment of this result, the wicked Spitemalina racked her brain for some time without coming to any satisfactory conclusion.

The island of the witchlings seemed, at length, to be the best chance of success after all. True, the boat could not be landed thereupon without the boy's own consent, and this would be difficult to obtain. But, although she knew that coaxing and blandishments would in all probability be unavailing, the fairy was not without hope that she could terrify

Bertie into doing all that she required, and, once on the island, she felt sure that she could manage to keep him there. She would trust the matter to no other person this time, but determined to undertake it herself. Accordingly, having followed the boat for some time in the disguise of a sea-serpent, she waited until Bertie was asleep, and then, reassuming her own shape, came close to the boat, and began to guide it in the direction she wished.

She was not, however, to be left to carry out her wicked designs without interruption. It happened that shortly after Bertie had left the rock and the cave, the Queen of all the mermaids came to visit her subjects and friends in that part of the world. Being greatly beloved by them all, she was received with delight and enthusiasm, and among other bits of news they told her of Bertie's expedition to the palace of the giant-king, together with all that had since occurred. The Queen listened with much attention, and being herself a magician of very high rank and power, knew a great deal more about the whole business than any of her people, as soon as her attention had once been called to it. She told the mermaids, therefore, that she was very glad they had done their duty so well by the boy who had been thrown in their way, especially as he chanced to be the son of a great friend of hers, and indeed of their whole race. Also she declared that she knew that Bertie would be exposed to great risks and dangers, owing to the machinations of a powerful enemy whom she could not then name, but over whom she would take care to keep some sort of guard.



The Queen was as good as her word, and so it happened that when the end of the year drew nigh, she personally watched the little boat which carried the boy and his fortunes. She saw the fairy Spitemalina, and was well aware of her evil intentions, which she determined to defeat. Therefore, as soon as the wicked fairy began to push the boat in a wrong direction, the Queen of the mermaids, diving underneath in front, began to draw it in the right way. Seeing nobody, but feeling that the boat was not going as she wished, Spitemalina got angry, and after a little while came round in front of the little bark, and there met the Queen of the mermaids face to face. She instantly flew into a passion, and asked who she was and why she interfered with *her* boat ?

To this the Queen calmly replied that she disputed the ownership ; that the other, moreover, was only a land fairy, and had no authority over the sea. Upon this, without more ado, Spitemalina flew upon her and a terrific combat began, which Bertie, as I have said, awoke in time to witness. Its issue, however, was never for a moment doubtful ; although the fairy was the stronger in size and physical development, she was by no means superior in the magic art to her adversary, who was, besides this, in her own element, with countless allies within easy call. She needed not, however, to summon any of them, for after a few moments, during which Spitemalina got thoroughly well ducked, and had the mermaid's tail sharply applied to her face, head, and shoulders more than once, she with difficulty wrenched herself away from the hold of the Queen, and with loud howls of

wrath and pain, flew off, foiled and discomfited. Then the victorious Queen of the mermaids turned and gave Bertie a sweet and gracious smile, and immediately dived down beneath the waves of the blue ocean.

The boy gazed for a moment longer upon the spot where the battle had taken place, and then sank gently back and fell into a sweet sleep. He was awakened by sounds very different from those which had previously disturbed his rest. The boat had drifted into a narrow, sandy creek, and was gently striking against the side of a bank, upon and sloping up from which appeared to be a lawn with a beautiful garden beyond. Bertie awoke to the smell of myriads of the sweetest flowers, to the most thrilling melody from the throats of a thousand birds, and to the pleasant sound of bees gathering their honey from the lime trees which were scattered about upon the lawn.

Close to the creek, standing upon the bank and looking down upon him in the boat, was a lady, somewhat magnificently dressed, and bearing upon her countenance an unmistakable air of dignity and grace. Several other ladies stood around her, who all appeared to pay her every mark of respect and deference. She was calling their attention to Bertie as he awoke, and a pleasant smile lit up her features as she saw that he was aware of her presence. 'Are you awake at last, my dear boy?' she asked with another kindly smile. 'If you are weary or distressed, you can find peace and rest in this kingdom, which is called the Kingdom of Contentment. Everybody here is contented, although some of us have had great sorrows, which cannot perhaps be soothed this

side the grave. We know, however, that they have been permitted only for our good. Strangers are always welcome here, and especially young strangers like yourself. I had a son once—alas!’ and here the lady stopped and sighed softly.

Whilst she was speaking Bertie had meanwhile felt for his faithful cuttle-fish and squeezed it hard in his hand as usual. To his joy and surprise, it made his fingers and hand tingle and burn to such an extent that he dropped it as if it had been a hot coal. At the same time he sprang to his feet in the boat, and looked the lady straight in the face.

‘Madam,’ he cried, in a state of great excitement, ‘had not thy son a dark mark on his left side?’

‘Indeed he had,’ replied the lady, ‘for in his early childhood the poor child fell against a warming-pan and the scar was never effaced.’

And,’ eagerly added Bertie, ‘a bruise on the ancle of his right foot?’

‘Certainly,’ answered the lady, ‘that was where the stupid nursery-maid struck him with the coal-scuttle.’

‘And a pain inside him after eating unripe gooseberries?’

‘He never could touch them without clapping his hands upon himself and howling,’ said the lady. ‘But how can you know this?’

‘I am he! I am he!’ shouted the boy in ecstasy, and in a moment exhibited his right foot with the bruise, pointed to the place in his side where the scar existed, and jumping on shore, threw himself into his mother’s arms (for that it was his mother he entertained

not the smallest doubt), and frantically asked for gooseberries.

The Queen—for such indeed she was—hesitated only for a moment whilst she looked at him steadfastly. 'Tis he! 'tis he!' she cried in tones of delighted surprise. 'I know his beautiful light hair. I recognise his sweet blue eyes. Does anybody want any further proof? Bring some unripe gooseberries, quick, somebody.'

Fortunately for Bertie, the season was so far advanced as to render this command difficult of performance, and, moreover, it was respectfully suggested to the Queen that the proof was one by no means satisfactory or infallible, inasmuch as other boys besides her son would, whilst of tender age, be probably affected in a similar manner by indulging in unripe fruit of any description. So they agreed to be satisfied with the bruise and the scar, and the Queen lavished her caresses on her newly-found child.

Bertie told his story, at which the Queen was much astonished, but most deeply grateful to the mermaids for having taken such care of her boy. His name, she told him, was certainly Bertie, which was not surprising, since the mermaids had learned it from his own lisping accents, and, moreover, he was the only child of his parents. They had naturally doated on him, and took every care of him. Unfortunately, however, the Queen had incurred the displeasure of the great fairy Spitemalina, who had vowed, and too surely taken, vengeance upon her. She had no power whatever as long as her Majesty remained within the Kingdom of Contentment, but unhappily she and

others of the people of that country were sometimes in the habit of making short journeys to the Discontented Islands, and it was not seldom that during such visits, temptations and evil of various sorts came upon them.

On one of these occasions Bertie's parents had taken him with them, and the wicked fairy, watching her opportunity, had inspired one of the grooms-in-waiting to talk to the nursery-maid who was left in charge of the boy as he lay sleeping in the little boat, and whilst her attention was thus engaged, had cunningly unmoored the boat, and let it drift out to sea. In fact, she had herself pushed it along until it was well out of sight of the shore, and had, before doing so, arranged some of the garments of the little prince in such a manner as to make it appear that he must have fallen into the water and been 'drowned. His parents had, of course, been plunged into the most profound grief, and had, after searching high and low for their boy in every possible direction, at length given him up in despair, and returned home in a state of disconsolate misery which all the joys of their kingdom could not abate.

Gradually, however, they so far rallied from the blow as to devote themselves as before to the promotion of the welfare and happiness of their people. Thus occupied, the wound, though it did not heal, became less painful, and the contentment which a good and virtuous life always brings with it, insensibly stole over them. They strove daily and hourly to do their duty, and were rewarded by the love and gratitude of all their subjects. The latter rejoiced heartily

when they heard that the young prince had returned, and you may imagine the happiness of the King when he returned that evening from laying the foundation-stone of a 'Hospital for the Idle and Dissolute' in a far off portion of his dominions, and found that he once more had a son and heir.

Great rejoicings took place in every part of the Kingdom of Contentment, and Bertie found himself the centre of attraction to admiring multitudes. Banquets were spread in his honour, dances given without end, oxen roasted whole, bonfires lighted, and everything else done which mortals do by way of showing their happiness at any auspicious event. This went on for some little time, and then the boy began to think of his old friends on the rock and in the cave. Indeed, he had never forgotten them, and used often to talk of them to his mother, and tell her of all the love and kindness he had received at their hands. He felt that it was his duty to revisit them, and also to pay his respects once more to the giant Grindlbuster, who had really treated him civilly on the whole, although this was not until he had been made acquainted with his royal origin.

The King and the Queen could offer no objection, but, at the same time, they frankly told him that after having lost him for so long a period, they felt as if they could hardly bear him out of their sight, lest he should again fall into trouble. Bertie, however, reminded them that he had still his cuttle-fish, and had, moreover, done nothing that he was aware of to forfeit the favour of the 'Friendly fishes of the sea,' who would doubtless be ready and able to aid him if

he required their assistance. Yielding to these arguments, the King and Queen let him depart, but not in such trim as that in which he had returned to them. A steamer was provided for him, manned by a gallant crew, and made after the most perfect model, and in this he journeyed to the rock of the mermaids at a much faster rate than that at which he had formerly gone there.

When the mermaids first saw the steamer, they yelled with affright and dived under the waves of the sea in every direction, for, in their innocence, they imagined it must be some new marine monster come to destroy them. They were somewhat reassured, however, when the vessel anchored in the bay, and a boat put off for their rock. And when the boat drew near and Bertie, leaving it at a short distance from the island, jumped into the sea and swam to the cave, their delight knew no bounds. They kissed him and hugged him, and dived, and plunged, and splashed, and whirled about in the water as if they would never have another chance of doing so again. Bertie, on his part, was very glad to see his old friends again, and interested them much by a recital of all his adventures. When he spoke of the services which their own Queen had rendered him so efficiently, every mermaid in the cave gave a loud cheer of delight, and then, waving their tails solemnly, they struck up 'God save the Queen,' and gave one more cheer afterwards.

When Bertie had finished all he had to say, he asked them whether, as prince and heir to a mighty kingdom, he could do anything for them in return for all they had done for him. 'No, dearest boy,' said

one of the mermaids with a sweet smile, 'there is nothing which you or any other mortal can do for us. We only wish for our free life on the rocks and in the caves, by the sea shore and under the foaming waves. We find our happiness alike in the glorious storms which send the billows foaming up towards heaven, and toss the ocean about in wild, seething confusion, and in the calm, tranquil surface of the same ocean when never a breath of air is stirring, and all is as quiet and tranquil as a child's first sleep. Leave us to sport with the waves, to sing on the rocks, and to be happy after our own fashion. You have other duties to which you must attend, and which call you far from hence. Go you to your father's court and perform those duties, and all we will ask of you is to think kindly of those who have loved you so well, and who will never forget you though you be far away from them.'

Bertie heard, and of course could do nothing for those who wanted nothing. He therefore contented himself with assuring the mermaids that there was not the slightest fear of his ever forgetting them, or thinking otherwise of them than with the sincerest feelings of affection. Then, before wishing them good-bye, he said that he must go to visit the giant-king according to his promise, and proposed to do so immediately. He was diverted from his purpose, however, by the intelligence which the mermaids gave him of the giant's decease. It appeared that some three months before Bertie's re-appearance at the cave, Grindlebuster had fallen out with another giant, and gone to war with him in spite of all that the monkey-



magician could say to the contrary. Unluckily, his enemy proved stronger than him, and utterly routed his forces, slew his favourite negro, and compelled the giant-king to own himself vanquished. Overwhelmed with rage and despair, the unhappy Grindlbuster shut himself up in his palace, neglected his affairs, wore his summer things in winter, never changed his stockings when they were wet, several times sat down upon his own hat, and eventually became a teetotaller. No constitution could long stand this, even if nothing else had occurred. But having been with much difficulty persuaded to take part once more in public affairs, he carried out his new principles by closing every public-house in the kingdom at nine o'clock, and forbidding anything to be sold but ginger-beer and soda-water. The publicans mightily resented this, but being in that kingdom, as in every other, a modest, humble, and retiring class of men, only put forward their grievances by meek petitions, in which they represented the inconvenience which had been occasioned, not so much to themselves, as to the public generally. They also produced several doctors' certificates as to the unhealthiness of soda-water and ginger-beer taken habitually, without the addition of any stronger liquid.

At this the giant, who was a self-opinionated and obstinate man, flew into a violent passion, and declared that he would hang every doctor in the kingdom who talked such nonsense. Determined also to do more than this, he invited many of the petitioners to a banquet, and to prove the wholesome nature of the beverage, drank off in alternate bottles four dozen

of soda-water and the same quantity of ginger-beer, with scarcely any interval between each. The consequences were even worse than the doctors had ventured to suggest, for scarcely had the last bottle been finished, when a loud fizzing noise was heard, and the body of the unfortunate giant was blown into a thousand fragments. So, literally, went off poor Grindlebuster, and Bertie therefore found that to pay a visit to his palace would be worse than useless.

As this was the case, there remained nothing more to be done but to return home to his father and mother in the Kingdom of Contentment. This he accordingly did, and encountered no interruption upon his voyage. Indeed, the great fairy Spitemalina had received such a shock in her encounter with the Queen of the mermaids, that she was never quite the same woman again, and, for some time after the battle, was such an invalid that she never left the island of the Witchlings, where she had repaired immediately afterwards for nursing and change of air.

Bertie would have been glad to see the Queen of the mermaids once more, and to thank her for her former assistance, and for all that her subjects had done for him. He never *did* see her, though, and perhaps it was not necessary, for good and charitable people who do acts of kindness towards others from right motives, do not require to be thanked, inasmuch as they look for no gratitude, but find the best and truest reward in the approval of their own consciences and the satisfaction they feel in knowing that they have done well. So the mermaids wanted no more thanks than Bertie had already given them, and must,

doubtless, have been always happy when they thought over the good they had wrought for their favourite. He, for his part, passed a happy life in the Kingdom of Contentment. Taught by the example of his parents, he strove to promote the welfare and happiness of all around him, and, like all who adopt that wise course, found therein his own comfort, and lived to the end of his days a happy and contented man.

*PRINCE MERIMEL.*

FRANK ALISON was a boy of about twelve years old, with tastes and habits not particularly different from the general run of boys. He had a considerable affection for his father and mother, and was not otherwise than fond of his brothers and sisters, and other members of his family. Upon the whole, he could hardly be said to be enthusiastically devoted to learning, and one may say without fear of being unjust to the boy, that he preferred play-time to school any day in the week. School, in fact, was the less pleasant to the young gentleman, owing to a habit he had contracted (or perhaps it came naturally to him) of thinking of something else during the time which ought to have been entirely given to study. This unfortunately brought him into occasional difficulties with his master, Mr. Switcher, and resulted in consequences somewhat inconvenient and uncomfortable to the youthful pupil.

His play-times, however, were very delightful. In the winter there was the large pond in his father's park, which, when the weather was cold enough, afforded rare opportunities to the sliding and skating young people, and the ice upon which was so good that many

came from the country round to indulge in their favourite pastime upon it, and thus gave to Frank not only the pleasure of witnessing a merry and exciting scene, but also of learning the art of skating at an early period of his existence. Then, in the spring, came the mighty joy of birdsnesting. Oh, the delight of that time! Oh the happiness of the boy who has at his command good hedge-rows, or, better still, a shrubbery of fair size in which to exercise his birdsnesting powers! How he creeps among the bushes, and peeps into every thick branch with eyes from which the most cunningly concealed nest can hardly escape! Out darts the blackbird with a chuckle, which, even in her fright, has something cheerful about it, and immediately afterwards her home is patent to the prying eyes, a home carefully constructed of twigs, hay, moss and mud outside, and lined with hay inside, after the most approved blackbird fashion. Her five eggs—sometimes, but rarely, six—have had the interior of the nest thus prepared for their reception, and their curious mottled-green colour (if a word may be coined where one is wanting to describe exactly the hue of the egg) contrasts prettily with that of the hay lining on which they repose.

Then, in the stem of an old laurel tree, or sometimes in the fork of branches, quite open and exposed, the mud-lined nest of the grey thrush is to be discovered, with the eggs of light blue with little black spots upon the larger end, and the nest, save for its lining, built much after the fashion of the blackbird's work. In the box-hedge, or in the low quickset-hedge or any thick little bush near the ground, the brown

hedge-sparrow tries in vain to hide her small nest and light blue eggs from the exploring boy, and even the water-wagtail has often failed to conceal her home within the secret recesses of the faggot-stack, so determined is the searcher in his favourite enterprise.

All these pleasures fell to Frank's share, and then when summer replaced spring, and the sun began to show his power and to warm the world below with his heat, the all-absorbing sport of cricket summoned to the field every English boy that was worth the name, and you may depend upon it that Frank was not behind-hand in his devotion to that noble game. Then autumn brought with it the shooting season, and great was his delight when he was declared old enough to go out with his father, and watch the latter whilst he stalked over the stubbles and through the turnip fields in pursuit of the partridges which there abounded.

But I must describe no further the particular pleasures of the different seasons, for it is of the greatest consequence that the story I have to tell should be reached at once without any more descriptions or reflections upon matters which do not immediately relate to it. Cricket was not the only amusement in which Frank delighted to pass his leisure hours in the warm days of summer. He had, at a very early period of his life, been presented with a wooden cross-bow, which speedily became his favourite toy. Everybody knows how a good cross-bow is made and managed. The strong cord which reaches from one end of the bow to the other having been tightly secured to each end, is drawn up and pulled over the little wheel or nut which is worked by the trigger. In this wheel is a narrow

groove into which the wooden end of the arrow is fixed, and if the groove of the open barrel of the stock is well and smoothly made, and the arrow laid straight therein, having been carefully adorned with a leaden head, tapering to a point, the said arrow, upon the trigger being pulled, goes well, straight, and strong for a long distance, and will bring to the ground any beast or bird of small size which it fairly strikes. This instrument, in the hands of a skilful archer, is really one of a formidable character, and many a bird did Frank secure with it, the only requirement being that the bow should be held steady and straight, and that the bird should not (as birds have an awkward habit of doing) fly away just before the arrow reaches the spot on which it had been sitting.

Well, one of Frank's favourite amusements in summer time, when no cricket was going on, was to take this same cross-bow of his, with a goodly bundle of arrows, and go out for a ramble in the woods. There was one old wood in particular to which he was much attached, and which afforded him constant sport, owing to the number of wild creatures, beasts and birds, which frequented it. Part of this wood was full of brakes and briars and thick underwood, into which no boy could penetrate without considerable danger of clothes-tearing and hand-scratching. Not that Frank would have minded these misfortunes more than other boys of his age, but, owing to the thickness of the bushes, it would not have been possible to have carried his cross-bow with him, or, at least, to have used it to any purpose if he had done so. But a large part of the same wood was only occupied by huge old pol-

lard oaks, ash, and hornbeam, standing at a certain distance from each other, and affording plenty of room for people to walk about beneath their lofty, wide-spreading branches, and over the wide spaces which here and there intervened, full of fern, but not so rough as to prevent the easy passage of animals who had not wings to fly above them.

There were not many people, however, who *did* walk about there, because the wood belonged to Frank's father, and could only be entered by persons to whom he had given leave to do so. And as it was in his park, and the deer made it a favourite haunt, Mr. Alison was not partial to having it disturbed by strangers. Frank, however, not coming within this category, had, of course, the free run of his father's park, and very frequently took a long ramble through this particular wood. The jackdaws who built in the old pollards must have well known him and his cross-bow by sight, and trembled for their young when the latter first crept out of their nests in the holes of the trees, and sat upon the low branches. The young rabbits, too, as well as the more wary parents, must have disliked Frank's habit of peeping over the banks to get a shot at them as they sat sunning themselves outside their earths, and the lively squirrels cannot have hailed as a friend the boy who never saw one of them seated on a high branch, enjoying himself after the fashion of squirrels, without sending a leaden messenger to awaken him from his fancied security.

But the small birds must have hated him worse than the others, for he had become very skilful with his weapon, and crept so craftily after the tits and tree-



climbers and nut-hatches, that they must have all agreed in considering him a common enemy. Still, it was sport such as boys have always delighted in, and from which they will hardly be weaned until the nature of mankind changes in a most remarkable degree.

I have said that Frank loved to ramble through the wood with his cross-bow, but he was not always engaged with it during his rambles. He would frequently carry an amusing book in his jacket-pocket, and when he was tired of shooting, or felt inclined to rest from the heat, he would sit down upon some shady moss-covered bank or under some well-leafed tree, and take a turn at reading by way of a change. So it chanced upon one lovely summer's day that he had gone out for one of his pleasant woodland walks, and had enjoyed it more than ever.

I am sorry to say that his amusement had been chiefly caused by his coming upon some golden-crested wrens, who fluttered prettily among the crowns of the old pollards, hopping rapidly from twig to twig, darting from tree to tree, and looking, with their bright and beautiful plumage, quite like birds from a foreign and warmer country than our own dear, east-wind afflicted England. Here, however, they were on this pleasant summer's day, the warmth of which just suited them, and right happy would they have been but for the presence of so pertinacious and tiresome an enemy as young Frank. He followed them resolutely from tree to tree, and all the more so because they were birds which he did not see every day of his life, and when an English boy, or, for the matter of that, an

English man, sees a rare bird, instead of wishing it to live and welcoming it as a stranger should be welcomed, an intense desire to kill it immediately possesses his mind.

Whether this should be taken as a proof of the bloodthirsty nature of men in general, and of Englishmen in particular, is more than I like to say, but the fact, though sad, is equally undeniable. And although golden-crested wrens are not so very rare in our land, they were somewhat uncommon in the part of the country in which Frank lived, and as soon as he saw them he became full of an earnest desire to have one or two of them stuffed and put into a glass case, in order to ornament the mantelpiece of his bed-room. Perseverance is, in this world, very frequently rewarded with success, and I regret to say that, although the rapid movements and never ceasing vigilance of the little birds for some time eluded all Master Frank's skill, yet in the end he succeeded in securing one of the number, which fell lifeless from the tree, after being hit by one of the leaden arrows which he launched against it.

Poor little thing! Its life had been short, and, let us hope, happy. It must have been an innocent life, too, passed in the free woodlands with its tiny brothers and sisters, with whom, not long before it encountered its fate, it had crept out of the hole in that large, soft ball of moss and wool which its parents had built for their nest in a young silver-fir tree, and had gazed wonderingly upon the bright and beautiful world which it was so soon to leave. I fear that Frank had little of pity for that gay young life cut short by his cruel

arrow, as he held the bird in his hand and gazed upon its lovely feathers, delighted at his success in obtaining the victim which he had pursued so long.

He now turned from the pursuit, took off his cap to cool his head, walked along under the trees which afforded the most shade, and after a little while determined that his best course would be to find a comfortable place to sit down and read his book until he was rested, and cool enough to continue his ramble.

Down he sat, accordingly, took his book out of his pocket, laid his wren very carefully upon his handkerchief, and doubled the latter over it so as to keep it quite safe, and then began to read. He had not continued this occupation very long before he found that a drowsy feeling was stealing over him, not very unlike that which he had occasionally felt in school when the master was reading or lecturing, and when the boys had nothing to do but to listen. He didn't seem to be able to follow the thread of his story quite correctly, and once or twice he caught himself nodding, and found he had to read the last few sentences over again, to understand where he had got to in the tale. Then, the bees kept humming in a dreamy tone, and the songs of the birds had a sleepy sound in them, and a *very* faint, soft breeze rustled in the leafy foliage above his head, and seemed to speak of repose and quiet.

In short, everything around him seemed so peaceful, and the very air itself so soft and balmy, that Master Frank could no longer resist the influences of the time and place ; gradually the book slipped from his hands, which in their turn fell by his side ; his head

leaned backwards against the root of the old oak at whose foot he was reclining, and in a few seconds he was in as deep a slumber as he ever had been in his life. Now, sleeping in a wood is not always a good and desirable thing. You may catch cold, though that is improbable in warm, dry weather ; you may insensibly get your head lower than your body, which causes the blood to run towards it, and not unfrequently produces a severe headache. Still more probably, insects of various kinds may issue from the trees and ground near you with unpleasant intentions, and you may suddenly wake to find that you have been peacefully reclining upon an ant's nest, or something equally delightful. None of these things, however, happened to Frank, but something much more extraordinary than any of them, and which I never should have known but for my family friendship with the woodpeckers, one of whom witnessed the whole affair and very kindly told me the particulars, with full permission to make them known to the world.

How long the boy slept the woodpecker could not tell me, but I suppose it could not have been very long, and that which I am going to write about might as well have happened directly he was sound asleep as at any other time. He slept peacefully and quietly as boys of twelve years old are apt to do, even when they have upon their consciences so great a crime as the murder of a golden-crested wren. The air blew softly upon his cheek, the fragrance of the summer flowers lulled him sweetly to rest, all was peace and harmony around him, and save the gentle rustle of the summer breeze, everything in nature was profoundly still.

Suddenly, in his very ear, the wind seemed to convey, in a low murmuring voice, the strange and unexpected words, 'Merimel is coming.' So softly, however, were the words whispered, and so deeply did the boy sleep, that the sound awakened him not, and still he breathed calmly and regularly as youthful sleepers do, and knew not that anyone had spoken to him. Then the leaves took up the tale, and rustled with more energy than was occasioned by the action of the soft air, as they shaped their sounds into the self-same mysterious words, 'Merimel is coming.' Yet still Frank slumbered on, for the wind and the leaves both spoke in such a soothing tone of voice that they were likely rather to hush than to rouse the weary sleeper. And next the woodland flowers, sending forth a stronger and sweeter incense than usual, bent their heads hither and thither as if whispering to each other, and one and all uttered the same never-varying tale, 'Merimel is coming.'

No sign still from the sleeping boy, but his breast heaved just the same and his eyes remained closed, and doubtless he was far away in the glorious Dream-land. Then the bees began to hum more loudly than was their wont, as they buzzed about among the flowers and about the branches of the lime trees. They seemed for a time to have forgotten the honey which it was their special business and duty to collect, and each one as he passed his neighbour seemed to buzz into his ear those same portentous words, 'Merimel is coming.' And now the birds took up the tale; small and great they began to fly to and fro in great excitement, fluttering their wings and chirping

to each other in eager tones as they perched on the branches of the trees, and announced to the woodland world the same all-important fact, 'Merimel is coming.'

The birds made more noise than the bees, as the latter had made more noise than the flowers, the leaves, and the soft zephyr; and as their chattering grew louder and louder, and birds of larger size joined the chorus, Frank's senses were visibly affected by what was going on. He turned listlessly in his sleep upon one side, moved his head, drew up one of his legs, and presently half opened his eyes, though only to close them again immediately. Very quickly, however, he opened them again, when the shrill sound of a trumpet, or something akin to a trumpet, though it seemed as if the noise proceeded from a smaller instrument, rang distinctly in his ears, and he awoke to the sound of the words, apparently uttered by a hundred different voices at once, in different tones and keys, but all expressive of joy and delight—'Merimel is coming!' Frank was wide awake in a moment, and sat upright rubbing his eyes and wondering what it all meant, and what was going to happen. He had not long to wait. Other trumpets joined in, and their clarion notes rang clearly and loudly through the wood, whilst louder and louder grew the shout, 'Merimel is coming!'

Frank looked round him in the greatest astonishment. Was not this his father's wood, and was not he his father's son? Were they not in England, both wood and boy, and was not England a quiet and peaceful country, in which no war had been heard of for some time, and whose woods were very little in the

habit of resounding with trumpets or other martial sounds? And, in the name of all that is curious, who was Merimel? Such thoughts flashed quick as lightning through the boy's brain as he sat for a few moments listening to the curious noise around him and looking right and left for a solution of the mystery. Presently, as the shouts grew louder, a number of rabbits came into sight, and advanced directly from the left towards the tree under which Frank had been taking his rest. They were not ordinary rabbits, though, either in their dress, appearance, or timidity. Of the latter quality, indeed, they appeared to have none, but came on without the slightest apparent consciousness of the presence of one of their human foes, or, if they had the consciousness, with the most perfect fearlessness. Their dress so far differed from that of ordinary rabbits that each one was clad in a white tunic, apparently of linen, and of fine texture, whilst instead of running on all fours, as rabbits, when seen by mortals, usually do, they danced forward on their hind legs, blowing small silver trumpets with great enthusiasm, and shouting at intervals, at the top of their voices, the now familiar words, 'Merimel is coming!'

There were a goodly number of these creatures, and they all passed before Frank in as orderly a manner as was consistent with their capering and dancing, and drew up some way to the right of the oak tree under which he was stationed. But there was no one among the rabbits whom Frank could make out to be the famous Merimel, whoever or whatever he, she, or it might be, and he gazed with the



FRANK AWAKES IN HIS FATHER'S WOOD





greatest curiosity upon those who followed, in hopes of discovering the secret. Those who followed were squirrels, hopping, and bounding, and skipping along in an incredibly active manner, each wearing a short grey cloak upon his shoulders, cleverly fastened by a buckle round his neck in front, and all shouting eagerly with one accord, in shrill but melodious voices, 'Merimel is coming.'

'So he may be,' thought Frank, 'but I don't suppose he is among those skipping little fellows, or else he would be come, instead of coming. Halloo! what on earth is this?' That which excited Frank's surprise was a perfect regiment of cock pheasants, marching two and two, with all their gaudy plumage evidently got up for the occasion with special care, and having each a little dark blue flag streaming from his neck, which, being broadly tipped with gold, gave the whole band a very gorgeous appearance. These walked more sedately than the rabbits and squirrels, and instead of indulging in constant and random shouts, only paused about every quarter of a minute, and then, all at one and the same time, crowed forth in loud and exultant tones, 'Merimel is coming.' The pheasants took up their station nearly opposite Frank's tree, having the squirrels and rabbits beyond them, and immediately upon their heels came a tumultuous throng of moorhens and dabchicks from the lake by the side of the wood. These creatures waddled forward as well as they could, having pink and white streamers upon them, and making the best show they could under the circumstances. On they came, and established themselves next to the phea-

sants, croaking out loudly as they advanced, 'Merimel is coming.'

'No doubt of *that*, I suppose,' said Frank, who now began to get rather impatient to see who *was* coming after all ; and just as he said so, still louder cries rent the air, and a compact body of hares came galloping up, each with a blue and white garment thrown over him ; these immediately arranged themselves next to the moor-hens, and, as they did so, shouted with one accord in the same tones of joy and gladness, 'Merimel is coming.' Immediately behind the hares, who were of the ordinary size and colour of such animals, came another band, upon whom Frank's most earnest attention was immediately concentrated. Something white and something shining he could see, but whatever it was was almost hidden from his eyes by a dense flight of woodcocks, who, apparently acting as a bodyguard to some personage of distinction, flew around him so carefully and so closely that only occasional glimpses could tell the bystander that there was anyone there at all. But when the woodcocks had advanced a little further, they took up ground, not next to the hares who had preceded them, but right in front of the hares, moorhens, pheasants, squirrels, and rabbits, and in the centre of the whole line, exactly opposite to the oak tree and the boy. Then Frank could see clearly all that passed, and it was not long before he saw it. The woodcocks fell back right and left, proclaiming as they did so, by means of silver speaking-trumpets, which they used, strange to say, without any injury or inconvenience to their bills—'Merimel is *come* !'

Immediately in front of Frank was placed a low kind of carriage, or chariot, apparently composed of brass, but so exquisitely and perfectly made as to be as light to draw as it was beautiful to behold. Drawn it had undoubtedly been, and that by eight milk-white hares, the perfection of whose shape, limbs, and proportions Frank could not help admiring as he saw them standing harnessed to their master's chariot. For there was a master, and it was upon him that the boy found himself gazing with intense and almost awful wonder. In the chariot, standing upright, and waving his hand to the woodcocks to settle and remain quiet, was a figure about two feet high, or perhaps a little taller. Apparently it was made of bronze, exquisitely wrought and cast in no ordinary mould, but yet its motions and gestures showed it to be alive, and its voice proved it to be something more than inanimate metal. Over its shoulders was carelessly flung a magnificent cloak of silver network, around its waist was a belt of crimson and gold, whilst the high-heeled shoes upon its feet were richly ornamented with gigantic silver buckles, and in every part of its dress where they could be made available, appeared precious stones of quantity unusual and in quality certainly unrivalled.

Frank gazed, I say, with extreme wonder upon this strange creature, the like of which he had not only never seen, but had never imagined even in his wildest dreams. Nor was his wonder lessened when it spoke, spoke in perfectly good English, and in tones so clear and thrilling that they seemed to go down the boy's backbone just as if somebody had poured a glass of

iced water down his back when he was least expecting it. And not only did the mysterious being speak, but it addressed itself especially and directly to him, Frank Alison. Yes, it was impossible to doubt that such was the fact, for not only did it look straight towards him, and point with its forefinger directly at him, but the nature of its words was such as made it perfectly certain that he and he only was the individual to whom those words were addressed.

As is often the case with beings of a magic order, such as we may suppose this to have been, the words were spoken, not in vulgar prose, but in that rhyme which is dear to woodland fairies and the like, and thus they ran :—

‘Whoever, among mortal men,  
Lord of the soil, or humble groom,  
Kills here a golden-crested wren,  
Has earned—and must endure his doom.  
Still shall the wretch remain alive—  
Release by death in vain may crave—  
The law of fate, for seasons five,  
Condemns him to become my slave.  
Rise, varlet, rise, within this wood  
Serve Merimel and own his sway,  
To me the slaughtered wrenlet’s blood  
For vengeance cries—and I obey !’

Frank heard this speech with the deepest astonishment and the direst dismay. That he was guilty of the death of the golden-crested wren was not to be denied. So to speak, he had been caught red-handed, with the body of his victim by his side, but the threatened punishment appeared to him far too heavy for the offence. What had he done more than any other boy in his place would have done? How could

he tell that the wren was such a particularly precious bird, or that she had such powerful allies? Besides, he had always thought there *could* be no slaves in England. He had often heard his father declare, with that pride in his country and her constitution which every Englishman possesses and generally parades upon every possible occasion, that 'Britons never would be slaves,' and that any slave touching a shore on which the British flag waved, became a free man by that very act.

Was it, then, possible that Merimel, or fifty Merimels, could make him, Frank Alison, a slave, and that in his own father's park? No, it could not be; it was all nonsense, and so he would tell this stupid little bronze figure at once. He essayed to speak, therefore, and actually did get out of his mouth the words, 'I don't like to be a slave, and I shan't be one, either,' when a woodcock's breast was suddenly pressed so close upon his lips that he could not for the life of him get out another word, whilst at the same moment he was perfectly covered with the same sort of birds, settling upon him in such numbers that he was nearly smothered, as with a featherbed.

Presently, as he lay perfectly helpless, for the weight of woodcocks really seemed so great as to prevent his moving hand or foot, he felt the birds move off his face, and was able to open his eyes. When he had accomplished this, the first thing he perceived was the bronze figure of Merimel standing upon his breast, holding a small but sharp sword, whose hilt was one single ruby of immense size and brilliancy, with the point directed immediately towards his heart. The

weight of the figure was, though not great, sufficient to be felt, and his eyes sparkled so vividly that Frank experienced a singular sensation as he looked into them, and indeed was scarcely able to do so for a moment before he found himself obliged to close his own.

‘I spare your life, slave,’ said the strange person who thus held him in his power, ‘I spare your life because I know that you cannot escape from me. Nay, I will tell you at once that your new life will not be without its good as well as evil, and may in time become positively comfortable. But a slave you are, and a slave you must and will be. Do not think to evade the doom which your own cruelty has brought upon you. You are in my power: the glance of my eyes will at any time subdue you in the space of a few moments, if it comes to the worst, but my magic power is too great, and my subjects and allies too numerous, to make it at all probable that I shall have to resort to that last expedient. You will now perform your first act of servitude by rendering assistance at the funeral rites of the beautiful little creature whose life you have so wantonly taken. Rise up!’

With these words the speaker leapt from the breast of Frank, and gave him a contemptuous kick in the side as he bade him a second time to rise. At the same time the woodcocks all fluttered off his body and limbs, and no longer prevented him from moving. If the boy could have consulted his own inclination, I doubt whether he would have risen at all, except for the purpose of taking summary vengeance upon those who had treated him in such a disagreeable manner.

But Master Frank was quite sharp enough to know that he had no common creatures to deal with. To take one fact alone, it was most unusual, not to say unnatural, that such a vast number of woodcocks should be found together in that part of the country in the middle of summer, and this of itself bore an appearance of magical interference with the laws of nature which could not be overlooked by any person of acuteness. But, in addition to this, and to the extraordinary congregation of birds and animals which he had lately witnessed, there was the marvellous and unheard of circumstance of their being accompanied and evidently commanded by a bronze figure, endowed with life and powers of locomotion, and not only these, but with gifts, as Frank could not but suppose, of a strange and mysterious nature, very near akin to magic.

So, upon the whole, I do not believe that the boy would have made any demonstration against the woodcocks or their commander, even if he had the power to do so. But that power was not given to him. In the very act of rising he felt some unseen, unknown, yet irresistible influence at work within him, which compelled him, whether he would or no, to obey the commands and follow the directions of the strange being before him. He rose and stood upright as he had been ordered. The small individual whose slave he had apparently become now gracefully waved his hand, and said in the same clear voice, but with a mournful cadence in his tones, 'Woodcocks!' Instantly every bird stuck its bill into the earth, tossed



it up again on high, and exclaimed in a note of ecstasy, 'Prince Merimel speaks.'

At all events, thought Frank as he heard this, I am in the service of a Prince, which, after all, is better than it might be.

He had no time for further reflections, for Merimel continued in the same tone, 'Tell the squirrels to bring that which they have prepared;' and three woodcocks instantly flew off with the message, one to give it, and the other two to bear witness that he made no mistake, which plan of sending three messengers would be a capital plan for everybody to adopt when they have messages to send, only very few people happen to have three servants always ready to go at the same moment.

Frank gazed listlessly after the woodcocks as they flew, and wondered what it could be which the squirrels had prepared, and of which this mighty Prince Merimel stood in need. His wonder came to an end in a few moments, for several squirrels speedily came forth from the main body, carrying something covered with a black velvet covering with a broad white fringe, which they respectfully placed at the feet of Prince Merimel. 'Now,' said the latter, 'summon the doves.'

Upon this, certain notes were sounded upon the silver trumpets, and in a few moments a number of turtle doves flew into the open space before the oak tree, and settled on the ground near Frank. 'Doves! do your duty,' exclaimed Prince Merimel, and accordingly each bird slowly and reverently approached Frank's handkerchief, in which lay all that remained of the golden-crested wren. They bent gracefully over the spot, and, each drawing a delicately embroidered

cambric pocket-handkerchief from under her wing, applied the same to her eyes before she proceeded to attempt anything else. Then, as if with an effort of pain, but a knowledge that the cruel task before them must perforce be accomplished, they unfolded the handkerchief, and disclosed the body of the ill-fated bird to the eyes of those who stood around. A low moan of anguish ran through the circle; one simultaneous sob of grief pervaded the surrounding group of doves, the attendant woodcocks, and the squirrels who had come from the main body. Louder and louder grew the wail of sorrow, until it was taken up by the whole number of animals present, and the shrill squeak of the grief-struck rabbits, the hasty chattering note of the sorrowing squirrels, the guttural sob of the pheasants, the croaking moan of the moorhens, and the plaintive wail of the tender hares, filled all the wood with dismal sounds of intense woe.

At this moment Frank felt supremely miserable, or, to say the least of it, remarkably uncomfortable. All he had done was to shoot a wren, as many other fellows had done before him, and by that not very strange or unnatural proceeding, he had apparently plunged all the innocent inhabitants of the wood into the most unutterable anguish and affliction. He could possibly, however, have put up with this, had not the consequences to himself been so very disagreeable. There he was, evidently an object—nay, *the* object—of detestation to all the birds and beasts around him, and not only that, but an object upon whom they might probably desire to wreak their vengeance, and who, if he was to be subject to the

whims and caprice of the person who seemed to be their Prince and favourite, might be exposed to their insults and attacks without any possibility of redress.

However, it was no use thinking about what might be in the future, what *was* in the present was enough for Frank, and he looked on in silent astonishment for several minutes, whilst the weeping and wailing continued. Then the mighty Prince Merimel spoke again. 'My children,' said he, 'do your duty.'

Then the squirrels came forward, and lifting up the velvet cloth, disclosed a circular box of walnut-wood elaborately carved and polished, and filled with the softest cotton-wool, which appeared when, at Prince Merimel's command, they carefully and reverently raised the lid. Prince Merimel now, heaving a deep sigh, gave a signal to the attendant woodcocks, who, standing round the handkerchief upon which lay the little wren, tenderly and respectfully lifted up her body with their beaks, and deposited it with the utmost care in the walnutwood box. The latter was then placed upon a small mound at the foot of the oak tree, and each of the woodcocks passed slowly before it, stopping as they did so to take a last look at the departed wren. Then, at another signal from the Prince, the whole army proceeded to do the same, but not in the same order as that in which they had taken up ground in front of the oak.

First came the pheasants, as being of the highest rank, next in dignity to the bodyguards of the prince himself. They strutted by in a proud manner, with haughty glances which showed their consciousness of noble birth and high position, and looked upon the

little wren with sorrowful eyes indeed, but with a species of contempt for all the pomp and ceremony around them, which showed at once that they were superior to it, and only submitted to take a part in it out of that loyalty to their Prince which is inherent in the breast of every well-born pheasant.

Next came the hares, gracefully ambling up to within a short distance of the spot where Merimel stood, and then walking with reverent mien past the walnutwood box, and frequently applying their handkerchiefs to their eyes as they gazed upon its melancholy contents. These were followed by the squirrels, who had some difficulty in preventing themselves from hopping and skipping as they passed the place, but upon the whole conducted themselves in a decent and becoming manner. The moorhens and dabchicks waddled past next, all apparently very sorrowful, and last of all came the rabbits, who indulged in frequent squeaks of grief as they gazed upon the little box and realised the sad truth that the golden-crested wren was with them no longer.

When the whole army had thus filed past in order, Prince Merimel gave orders to the squirrels who had brought the box to close the lid and wrap it carefully round with the velvet cloth. When this had been accomplished he exclaimed in a loud voice, 'Slave! approach.'

It was the first time in his life that Frank had ever been addressed by this opprobrious epithet, and he would certainly have protested against it and disobeyed the command which was thus given to him, had not the same mysterious power which he had

before experienced again compelled him to render to it immediate and implicit obedience. He advanced, slowly and with trembling footsteps, towards the Prince, and stood meekly before him awaiting his next directions. These were not long withheld.

‘Take,’ said the Prince, ‘the box which you see before you in your open hands, and follow those who will guide you.’

Frank obeyed the command without delay, and taking in his hands the walnut box which contained the wren, raised it in his hands and held it on his open palms. Then Prince Merimel advanced to his chariot, which he mounted, and, surrounded by his woodcocks, stood until the rabbits filed off first, as they had come upon the ground, and marched into the wood in the same direction as that from which they had originally come. Then, in their former order, squirrels, pheasants, moorhens, and hares all followed, marching, however, with a slower and sadder step than that with which they had advanced when proclaiming the coming of Merimel. As soon as the hares had formed and began their march the Prince made a sign to Frank to follow them, which he accordingly did, carefully bearing the box as he had been directed. Immediately after him came the woodcock bodyguard, with the milk-white hares drawing the Prince’s chariot in the midst of them, and, thus formed, the procession slowly advanced for some distance through the wood.

Frank was all the time filled with mingled awe and amazement, and could not for the life of him understand what was going to happen, and how it would

all end. At last a loud sound from the trumpets of the rabbits in front told that they had come to a halt, and before long Frank found that this was the case. They had halted in the middle of an open space, surrounded by fern and oak trees, just where a large circular mound rose from the ground, which to the eye of the casual observer would have appeared to be the result of the making of some trench or ditch, the earth from which had been thrown out and left there until time had covered it with a coating of grass and moss. It must, however, have been there for a long time in any case, for several alder and willow trees had grown up upon and around the mound, and shaded it from the rays of the sun which otherwise would have fallen strongly upon the whole of that open space. This, though of course Frank knew it not, was the family burying-place of the golden-crested wrens, and here it was that his victim was about to be deposited.

As he drew near, meekly following the hares, he perceived a hole dug in the aforesaid mound, around which the rabbits, squirrels, pheasants, moorhens, and hares were drawn up in formal array. At this juncture two woodcocks flew forward, and admonished Frank by a sharp peck upon each of his ears, to pass in front of the hares and approach the grave, in which, at their further command, he carefully placed the walnutwood box, and then stood by awaiting further orders. Prince Merimel, alighting from his chariot, now ordered the rabbits to come forward, a chosen party of whom immediately began filling up the grave with the earth around, and then stamped,

jumped, and rolled upon it until it was quite firm and hard. Then each division of the army slowly advanced to the spot, and halting opposite, paid the last tribute of respect to the deceased wren after their different fashions. The rabbits gave one piercing squeak all at the same moment, which had a thrilling effect upon their audience ; the squirrels fired a salute of crackers with admirable precision and unanimity ; the pheasants all crowed their farewell at the same moment ; the moorhens and dabchicks gave a simultaneous and melancholy croak ; whilst the hares cried like children, but all so exactly at the same instant that it sounded as if one enormous child had given one tremendous cry ; and then all was over.

When the troops had thus performed their duty, the chariot of the Prince was slowly drawn up to the grave by the white hares, surrounded by the attendant woodcocks. The latter then all fixed their bills into the ground, raised themselves so as to give the appearance of standing on their heads, and fluttered their wings mournfully over the spot where lay the golden-crested victim. And then Prince Merimel stood upright in his chariot and thus pronounced the funeral oration of the deceased :—

‘ Within this wood, gold-crested wren  
    (Long time the home of thine and thee),  
Remote from haunts of cruel men  
    Thou hadst thy life of tranquil glee.  
No thoughts of sorrow or of woe  
    Thy peaceful life did e’er molest,  
Nor cares nor labour didst thou know,  
    Scarce fledged from out thy mother’s nest.

Thy tribe, sweet flutt'ers of the wood,  
Hung fondly from each branch and bough,  
In sport so innocent and good ;  
But all is strangely altered now.  
Still fondly to the boughs they cling,  
Still twitter on from morn till night,  
And gently on the branches swing,  
But never with the same delight.  
They mourn, alas ! their playmate sweet,  
The partner in each childish joy,  
Who haplessly his fate did meet,  
Slain foully by a ruthless boy.  
So pure—so innocent—so true—  
Ne'er better bird came forth from nest,  
Or proved himself, dear bird, than you,  
More worthy of a golden crest.  
Wherefore to-day are gathered here,  
From every quarter of the grove,  
The friends who stand around thy bier  
To show their deep, abiding love.  
The rabbits, in their dress unique,  
Come forth from every hole and den  
To pay by melancholy squeak  
Their tribute to the slaughtered wren.  
By squirrels ne'er to be forgot,  
Thy grave attracts the merry crew ;  
Each fires in grief his cracker-shot—  
'Tis all that squirrel grief can do !  
The lordly pheasant see advance  
(The monarch of the leafy glade),  
And loud deplore the sad mischance  
Which thee in early tomb has laid.  
Nor is it from our wood alone  
That issue forth the mourning folk,  
The moorhens from the lake have shown  
Their sorrow in the homely croak.  
And from their forms in wood and field  
The hares in num'rous bands appear,  
And nothing to the others yield  
In depth of woe upon thy bier.



Sweet bird ! 'tis mine to say farewell  
To virtues and to beauty rare,  
Which from our vision sadly fell  
When thou wast taken from our care.  
Mine was the care of every bird  
That nestled in this ancient wood,  
And I, by kindly act and word  
Did aye assist them as I could.  
But do the best that do I can,  
I may not stay the hour of death,  
And now the reckless hand of man  
Hath robbed thee of thy precious breath.  
Yet, nestling, though thou liest low  
Beneath this mound entombed alone,  
O let thy gentle spirit know  
Thy foe shall for his crime atone !  
The murd'rous hand that shed thy blood  
No more the blood of birds shall shed  
Whilst in the precincts of the wood  
It serves the brethren of the dead.  
The cruel brain that made the plan,  
With treachery and malice rife,  
No longer with the race of man  
Shall plot against a birdling's life.  
Enslaved, both brain and hand as well  
Shall do their master's least behest,  
And, at the beck of Merimel,  
Shall only move as *he* thinks best.  
To birds and beasts since pain he gave,  
And held them for his lawful prey,  
To beasts and birds I make him slave,  
Their every mandate to obey.  
So sleep, blest bird, in slumber sweet,  
Whilst this, thy miserable foe  
His punishment shall surely meet,  
And Merimel's dire vengeance know.  
So shall our wood in safety thrive,  
And know henceforth the race of men,  
That none may 'scape of all alive  
Who harms a golden-crested wren !'

Whilst Prince Merimel pronounced these words, which he did in clear and bell-like tones which rang through the summer air like the notes of a sweet-toned lute, all the animals around listened with a silence both respectful and profound. When he had concluded, they all sent up one simultaneous shout of 'Long live Prince Merimel !' at which token of their affectionate loyalty, the person in whose honour it was raised appeared pleased and gratified.

He bowed to them right and left from his chariot, and then, addressing them generally, spoke thus : ' I leave this man-child, who has forfeited his liberty, with you for the present. For the first month he will serve the rabbits, for the second the squirrels ; the pheasants will command his services during the third, the moorhens will take him for the fourth, and for the fifth he will be handed over to the hares. At the end of that time I shall return and give further directions. For the present, farewell ! '

So saying, Prince Merimel made a graceful bow to those whom he had addressed, and then drove off in his chariot, the milk-white steeds prancing merrily before they settled down into their usual pace, and the woodcocks fluttering gaily round their sovereign as he started on his journey. Where he went to or in what part of the world he generally resided, I have no power to tell you. All that I know for certain is that at that moment and at that season of the year he either did not reside in that particular wood, or else dwelt in some part of it which was not accessible to animals generally. At all events, as soon as the chariot was in motion, all the army left its ranks and

broke up into a confused mass of moving beings, but all appeared to be actuated by one desire, namely, that of following Prince Merimel as far as they could. They treated him, indeed, much after the fashion of a hero returned triumphantly from the wars, or a victorious candidate after a contested election, running after him, crowding upon his chariot, and squeaking, crying, and crowing forth all kinds of sounds, which were doubtless intended to express joy, sympathy, and a general feeling of friendliness, but which would certainly have startled his milk-white hares had they not been remarkably well trained, and might, under less favourable circumstances, have been productive of serious consequences. Off they went, as it was, with a great deal of clamour, and Frank was left perfectly alone by the side of the grave of the golden-crested wren.

Never before had he been placed in so strange a position as that in which he now found himself. So far as he could judge from what had occurred, he had before him the prospect of a long period of servitude, with no hope of release excepting through the mercy of his enslavers, if, indeed, the latter possessed any of that excellent quality. But there was something worse than mere slavery to Prince Merimel, for that he would have understood, though it would certainly have been unpleasant. But to be the slave of rabbits, squirrels, pheasants, moorhens, and hares, was a condition of life which he had never contemplated, and which would certainly be one most uncongenial to his temper, habits, and disposition. How could he ever bring himself to serve animals whom he had

hitherto always regarded as beings infinitely and by far inferior to himself in the scale of creation? The idea of becoming slave to rabbits, whose brethren he had eaten scores of times, roast, boiled with onions, done up in the shape of a curry, and, better than all, in a pudding or pie with pieces of boiled pork judiciously intermixed therein! Then again—to serve a squirrel! Why, the little creatures had always fled timorously before his face, and more than one had fallen a victim to that crossbow which had now apparently brought him into all this trouble. As to pheasants, he had seen his father shoot them, and had many a time revelled in a roast wing of the noble bird, or cheerfully broken his merry-thought and enjoyed his leg, without any thought that he should ever be placed in his present extraordinary position. Then the moorhens and dabchicks were birds whom he had always rather despised, as silly creatures of a very timid disposition, especially the moorhens, who had, as he knew, a ridiculous habit of sticking their heads into holes in the banks, and fancying that by this plan, since they could see nobody, nobody could see them.

How could he ever be a slave to such birds as *that*? And then, to conclude, with the hares! Why, the timid creatures were generally afraid of the very noise of a boy's footsteps, and Frank never could bring himself to believe that they would have the courage to order him to do anything. So he thought and pondered much and deeply over these things and his present condition, until at last he heard the shouts and cries of those who had followed Merimel gra-

dually subside, and began to think that before long he should certainly see some of them back again.

Nor was he mistaken. Within a short space of time, as the boy still stood musing near the grave of the golden-crested wren, a number of rabbits came running back, and were very soon all around him. 'Here's our slave!' they cried one to another, and came up to him without the smallest signs of fear or reserve, which struck Frank as remarkably extraordinary, since, on his previous visits to the wood, there was never a rabbit but had run from him as fast as it could as soon as ever he came anywhere near it. But not only did they come up close to him upon the present occasion, but proceeded to take the greatest liberties with him, scratching his feet and hands, butting against him with their heads, making faces at him, and, in short, treating him with the greatest contempt.

The boy remained perfectly silent from sheer astonishment, but when one young rabbit, more impudent than the rest, put its head and shoulders under the leg of his trousers, lifted the latter somewhat, and calmly gave him a severe scratch from the knee downwards, he lost all command of himself for the moment, and exclaimed in an irritated tone of voice, 'Confound you, don't do that!'

In a moment twenty squeaking little voices were upraised. 'Hear how the man-child speaks to his masters! Take down his pride, take down his pride!' And in the next moment a number of rabbits rushed upon him and endeavoured to throw him down; he would fain have remained upright, but the power of

resistance seemed to have gone from him. He was tumbled roughly upon the turf, and whilst there had his ears boxed, his face scratched, his nose pulled, and every species of indignity inflicted upon him by his new masters. As soon as he recognised the fact that some magical power had rendered him entirely powerless to defend himself, Frank lay perfectly quiet and attempted no further resistance, by which means he probably secured himself from further damage. Still, however, he was buffeted and bullied a good deal by the rabbits, who, being a people who do not get a man or boy to treat as they please every day in the week, probably thought that they had better make the most of the opportunity.

After a while, however, even the rabbits got tired of teasing an unresisting person, and gradually they left poor Frank alone. Then he rose from the ground, humbled and bruised, but having learned a lesson by which he determined to profit in the future. Accordingly, when an old buck rabbit now bade him follow a portion of the tribe to the great earths in a certain part of the wood, he made no show of opposition, but meekly obeyed the command. As they went, he was much jeered and squeaked at by the accompanying rabbits, but bore it all without a murmur, having by this time convinced himself that discretion was the better part of valour, and that he had nothing left for it but to submit, with as good grace as he could, to all the trials which might be before him. It was no great distance to the great earths, and when the party had arrived there the old buck rabbit pointed out to Frank a large hollow tree which stood immediately

above the earths, in which he told the boy that he might sleep, taking care to be constantly ready to attend to any of his masters who might require his services by night or day.

‘If,’ remarked the rabbit, ‘you were not a lout of such a large, lumbering size, you might have crept sensibly into the earth, and found a warm corner somewhere beneath the ground. But since you are so big as to render that impossible, and are miserably slow and clumsy in your movements to boot, you must just do as well as you can in the tree.’

This did not seem a peculiarly comfortable arrangement, and the tree itself did not look tempting, but there was no choice for it, and Frank was glad to see that although the bottom was hollow, the upper part of the tree was sound, and also that there was a good lump of straw in the hole. So, at any rate, he would not have to sleep upon the bare earth, and would have some kind of roof to keep from his devoted head the wind and rain, if either should come, which was more than probable in that happy land of England in which he dwelt. The rabbits had now gathered together in groups over the earth, discussing the events of the day, and talking, moreover, about the disposal of their prisoner.

It was agreed, after some consultation, that he should not be considered as the private property of any individual rabbit, even for a time, but that the whole tribe should have an equal right to his services, and should avail themselves of these as they could. This was rather a dismal prospect for the boy, as, although he could be termed he slave of no one

rabbit, yet it might easily happen that half-a-dozen having an equal right to his services might require him at one and the same time ; and as he could only make himself useful to one at a time, it was but too probable that he would offend the other five, who might all choose to wreak their vengeance upon him, although he would be perfectly guiltless of having given intentional offence. However, it was for the masters, and not the slave, to settle the conditions of his servitude, and he therefore awaited patiently and accepted without a murmur the result of their deliberations.

The first thing which he was told to do was no very difficult matter, although one to which he had been wholly unaccustomed. He was to sweep up all the litter in front of the rabbits' holes, and arrange smooth sunning-places in the sand for those who chose to come out and enjoy the declining rays of the afternoon sun. As these were many, and the holes very numerous, Frank found plenty of occupation, and, indeed, had not time to finish it thoroughly before some of the rabbits wished to come out, when he was obliged to leave off, as perfect stillness and quiet are essential to the perfect enjoyment of a rabbit when he sits sunning himself in front of his hole.

Save a passing scratch or two, however, Frank was not punished for not having finished his allotted task, probably because the rabbits knew it to have been impossible. He was then directed to keep watch at a little distance from the earths ; to let his masters know of the approach of any animal hostile to their race ; and was solemnly warned that if a fox, cat, or



stoat were suffered to come near to the earths without his having given due notice of their advance, the scratchings and buffetings which he had already received would be as nothing to the vengeance which would certainly fall upon him.

Frank departed on his task rather joyfully, being not without hopes that his father's keeper might possibly pass through the wood, in which case he might invoke his aid, and possibly effect his escape from a thralldom which, if not yet irksome, was unquestionably degrading. Such, however, was not the case, nor did any enemy of the rabbit people approach the place of his watch before the sun had nearly gone down, and the little animals were preparing to go below ground. Some there were, it is true, who stayed out at night, but these contemptuously informed the boy that their eyes and ears were better than his, and they should not require his services.

So he was permitted to retire to his hollow tree at a comparatively early hour, and, having nestled himself up in his straw, began to try to collect his thoughts. The events of the past day appeared so like a dream, that he said to himself over and over again, 'It *must* be a dream; it *is* a dream.' But then there he was wide awake, and with all his senses about him. Do all that he could, he could not understand it, why *he* should be chosen out of all the crossbow-shooting boys in the world to be punished for the killing of a single bird; how the Prince Merimel happened to have such wonderful authority in Frank's own father's wood; how the animals all seemed to talk perfectly good English, and to understand it as well—all these things

puzzled poor Frank so utterly and entirely that he thought he should have gone wild with thinking about them.

But instead of this he went to sleep, which was much better, and for a time forgot all his troubles, past, present, and to come. He slept as sound as a top—however sound that may happen to be—and would have continued to do so much longer if he had not been suddenly awakened by something pricking his feet rather sharply. He started up, and observed an old hedgehog, who had roughly pushed against him with her prickly hide. ‘Get up, youngster,’ she said in a harsh voice; ‘I’m the woman that comes in to help, and I am to call you of a morning in case you are not up betimes. You’ve got to go and look for lettuce and parsley and tender young grass for the rabbits; and won’t you catch it if you don’t bring a good lot?’

Thus accosted, poor Frank found he had no alternative but to obey. He had not any sponges or towels, and did not know what he should do without his usual bath; so, as he unrolled himself from the straw, he looked about rather disconsolately, which the hedgehog remarking, asked him gruffly what was the matter.

‘Please, ma’am, I want to wash,’ replied the boy.

‘Ugh, you nasty little beast,’ responded the other. ‘What a dirty creature you must be to want a bath! I never wash from one year’s end to another, unless I have to cross a stream, or tumble into a pond by accident. Nevertheless, if you are such a ninny, there’s the lake just at your feet.’

Frank looked up, and saw that, truly enough, as he now remembered, there was the lake close to the wood, at a very short distance from the rabbits' earths, and more than that, there was the bathing-house. So he hastily ran down to it, took the key from the nail on which it was hung, opened the door and went in. Very soon he had had a capital bath, although he found the water rather cold, as it was not yet five o'clock in the morning. But, what was almost better than the bath, he found a large rough cloak of his own, which he recollected that he had left in the bathing-house, and which he at once secured, feeling that it would be most useful to him as the nights became colder.

Having had his bath, he set off at once in search of food for the rabbits ; but, look as long as he might, there were no lettuces or parsley to be found in the wood. He roamed up and down until past six o'clock, which he had been told was the rabbits' breakfast hour, but nothing could he get but some young grass, and not nearly enough of that to satisfy the demands of his hungry masters. When, therefore, he returned to the earths, he found that he was in a great scrape. It seemed that the rabbits had divided themselves into two parties, one of which had gone out as of old to forage for themselves, whilst the other had remained at home, trusting to the exertions of their new slave to supply them with food. These last were amazingly disappointed and enraged, not only with the quantity and quality of the food which the boy had brought back, but also because the others had returned amply satisfied with the provisions they had secured for themselves, and were inclined to jeer and laugh at

those who had been too fine or too lazy to do the same.

The angry rabbits fell at once upon poor Frank, and cuffed and scratched him till he felt half inclined to cry. Nevertheless, remembering that this would not be of the slightest use, he wisely forbore, and only asked in a humble voice how he was to find parsley and lettuce in the wood. With many cruel sneers and reproaches the little animals replied that his own father's garden was not far off, and that *there* he would find a plentiful supply.

Frank was utterly astonished at this remark, as he had imagined that leaving the wood was a thing impossible for him to do, and he could not help thinking that, if he were once in his own father's garden, some of his relations or friends would be sure to see and save him from Prince Merimel's power. He said nothing, however, and during the rest of the day occupied himself in obeying, as well as he could, the many and various commands of his imperious masters. The mistresses, however, were really the worst. The buck rabbits occasionally bit and scratched him, it is true, but, excepting that they required him to sweep the ground in front of their holes, to keep watch for enemies when desired to do so, and to fetch food in the mornings, their wants did not seem to be excessive. But with the does there was really no end to it. One constantly wanted her ears scratched, another required her back hair to be combed continually, and several were always bothering the boy to carry their young ones out for an airing, which was an occupation he greatly detested, and thought that he might as well have been born a

nursery-maid at once, as to have such duties imposed upon him.

At all events he found that his life would be by no means a lazy one among the rabbits, and towards the close of the first day he began to feel considerably tired. Before, however, he retired to rest, he was especially warned by the old buck rabbit who had taken the lead in his affair from the first, that if he did not procure a supply of garden stuff for the next morning's breakfast, it would certainly be the worse for him. Accordingly, having been called about four o'clock by the same surly old hedgehog, Frank jumped up, had his bath as quickly as he could, and boldly set off in the direction of his father's garden, not without hopes of some result more agreeable to himself than to his masters in the wood. He arrived safely enough at the garden, climbed over a gap in the fence at one corner which he well knew, and found himself among cabbages, parsley, and lettuces enough to have supplied all the rabbits in the earths for some time to come. He would gladly have walked straight through the kitchen garden to the house, but the same mysterious power which he had felt in the wood obliged him now to commence and continue the duty which he had come to perform.

So, with a heavy heart and unwilling hand, he stooped down and began to rob his father's garden in the service of his little tyrants. He had picked a goodly number of cabbage-leaves, and sundry lettuces to boot, when he heard footsteps approaching, and, looking round, saw old Kirby the gardener coming along the walk in the direction of the place where he

was at work. His heart beat high with hope ; Kirby was a particular friend of his, and had often watched with interest his keen pursuit of the little birds which always hop about among the pea-sticks and the asparagus beds. He would be sure to see him soon, and then would follow inquiries, the result of which would assuredly be his freedom from this odious slavery, and his speedy restoration to his home and family.

To his surprise and sorrow, Kirby walked straight up to the spot where he was, and passed quietly by without taking the slightest notice of him whatever. Frank could stand it no longer. 'Kirby!' he shouted at the top of his voice ; 'I say, Kirby! Don't you see me? I'm here; Master Frank is here. I say, Kirby!' Alas! the man took not the smallest heed of his words and cries, but moved slowly onward, evidently quite unconscious of his young master's presence. Then the horrid truth flashed across the poor boy's mind, that he had been made by the magic powers of the wood, quite invisible to human eye and inaudible to human ear. Overcome with emotion, he sat down upon a cabbage and wept bitterly.

Time, however, was moving on, and he remembered that if he stayed there and gave way to his grief, he would suffer for it at the paws of those hungry rabbits who were doubtless already awaiting his return. So he arose, almost heart-broken at the failure of his hopes, and, being impelled by the same strange power, carried off his bundle of vegetables to those who had sent him, and laid down upon the rabbit's earth what they were pleased to allow was a most satisfactory supply.

And so, day after day, he lived among the little animals, obeying their commands, and carrying out their wishes as well as he could. One day's work pretty much resembled that of another, and no special incident occurred to enliven his existence or vary the sameness of his solitude. No one from home ever came near him. No search seemed to have been made for him, and a cold, hard feeling of neglect stole into his heart, so that he resigned himself to his slavery in a kind of callous indifference, and hardly knew when the first month came to an end, and he was called upon to enter a new service.

Upon the very day on which they had a right to claim him, the squirrels put in an appearance. The rabbits would gladly have demurred to giving up so useful a servant, but the commands of Prince Merimel were clear and definite, and must be implicitly obeyed. Upon that very day Frank must be transferred to the squirrels, who, for their part, were quite ready to receive him. Some of the rabbits had got to be rather fond of Frank, and there was always a story in the tribe of one doe having pressed upon him the photograph of herself and her last litter of young ones; but this was never duly authenticated, and for my own part I am not very clear that the art of photography is so commonly practised among rabbits as to make the story probable.

Be this as it may, he left the earth at the appointed time, and followed the squirrels who had come to claim his services. They conducted him to a different part of the wood, and showed him another hollow tree in which he might pass his nights. There were

several drays in the trees around, in which some of the squirrels had their habitations, and he soon found that his duties would be very different from those with which he had been occupied during his first month with the rabbits. The squirrels, in fact, not being accustomed to slaves, and being a very active and independent race, required of him much less than his first masters. True, he had to give them notice of the coming of any enemy, but the foes of the clever little climbers were less numerous and more easily evaded than those of the rabbits. Nor had the squirrels any sweeping work to do, or any cabbages and lettuces to be fetched for breakfast. All they required was that he should occasionally perambulate the wood in search of nuts, and the older animals, whose teeth were less strong than they had been, obliged him to crack their nuts for them when the fruit seemed harder than usual. So his time with the second set of masters would have been very easy if it had not been for their inveterate habit of seeking amusement from whatever quarter they could obtain it, and their discovery that in his case it might be obtained by making him climb all kinds of trees, some of which he found it uncommonly hard to manage.

The little creatures, moreover, would run up to the top of the highest branches, insist upon his climbing up as high as their drays, to see that the latter were in proper order, and would pelt him, as he did so, with nuts and bits of stick in a manner far from agreeable. Now and then he had an exceedingly awkward tumble, and, although fortunately he was never seriously hurt, he frequently went to bed almost tired to death, and



it must be owned that he was by no means sorry when the second month of his slavery came to an end, and he was directed to leave the squirrels in order to do service with the pheasants.

Those who are unacquainted with the usual mode of life and daily habits of a pheasant will find it difficult to understand the use which the gallant birds could find for a mortal slave. To the initiated it will not be so wonderful. At the time of year when Frank entered upon his third month of servitude the young birds were strong, and for the most part able to pick up their own living; but part of his duty was to attend to the backward birds, see that they were duly provided with clean water and good food, and protect them from any foes which might attack them whilst taking their daily exercise. The hen pheasants also constantly required their tails setting in order, and any loose or broken feathers carefully extracted, and their breast-feathers also had to be carefully combed and smoothed whenever they were going to receive company or call upon any of their friends. The cock birds rather domineered over the boy, and he began to appreciate the sharpness of a pheasant's spur when applied to the fleshy part of the calf or thigh, which was a method of chastisement in which some of the older birds particularly delighted. But, upon the whole, the service was lighter, easier, and more agreeable than that of the squirrels, and much more so than the slavery he had undergone with the rabbits, and he was almost sorry when, at the expiration of the third month, he found himself handed over to the tender mercies of the moorhens and dabchicks.

How devoutly thankful was he that this servitude chanced in the warm month of September! For his new masters, living upon the water and among reeds and rushes, not only loved wet and damp places themselves, but never for a moment thought that they could be unsuited to the habits or injurious to the health of anybody else. So they expected their slave to be always waddling about in their lake, and, though he could swim pretty well, he would certainly have been drowned had he not succeeded in convincing them that, his nature not being that either of a fish or an aquatic bird, it was perfectly impossible for him to entirely adopt the life, manners, and habits of either one or the other. Thereupon they contented themselves with letting him wade about within his depth, not so much out of consideration for him or his feelings, as for fear that if he perished they should both lose their slave and very probably get into trouble with Prince Merimel. Still, they obliged him to perform such duties and to remain in such places as caused it to be simply impossible that his feet and legs should ever be dry, and had it not been a dry and warm month, he would assuredly have caught his death of cold and rheumatism. Fortunately for him, the weather was singularly fine during that September, and, moreover, he obtained their consent to his sleeping in the boat-house, which I need scarcely say was of the greatest service to him, and alone enabled him to thrive under such unpropitious circumstances. The duties he actually had to perform were not particularly onerous, excepting that of guarding the young moorhens and dabchicks from the rats and

pike, their voracious and insatiable foes. He managed pretty well with the rats, of whom he slew several, and greatly pleased his masters by doing so. *That* was comparatively easy, because all he had to do was to get the young birds to keep close together, and as much as possible away from the banks frequented by their enemies, and when one of the latter ventured upon an attack, he was always on the alert, and ready to defend his precious charge. But with the pikes it was more difficult, because they had a habit of darting up from below, rising from the holes beneath the water where they had been lying, and thus coming upon the young birds without the possibility of Frank seeing them. Fortunately, the birds had by this time got to be of such a size that very few pike in that lake were large enough to be able to manage them, but yet the boy lost two or three of the precious ducklings, and on each occasion got such a beating about the head and face from the wet wings of the bereaved mothers and their friends, that he heartily wished there had never been such a thing as a pike born, in which, unless the said fish could have come into the world already roasted, and with a pudding inside him, many other people, not being habitual fishermen, will cordially agree. The moorhens often expressed their sorrow that he had not come to them in nesting time, for then, said they, he might have been useful in bringing food to the hen bird whilst setting, if indeed he had not been able actually to assist in hatching the eggs. This, however, Frank could not regret on his own account, since, from the experience he had already undergone, he felt certain that the hen

moorhens would have been worse tyrants at such times than at any other, and that the miseries of his slavery would have been indefinitely increased. At length the time drew near when the fourth month would expire, and he would have to leave the service of the water-birds for that of the hares.

I cannot say that Frank felt at all sorry at the prospect of the change, although he had no idea of the sort of service which might be imposed upon him. But the weather began to grow cooler towards the end of the month, and when the sun was off the water it was not very pleasant to have to stand in it for any length of time. So, upon the whole, Frank came to the conclusion that the moorhens' service, though not so arduous as that of the rabbits, was by no means healthy or delightful, and he rather welcomed the change with which his fifth month of slavery was to be commenced.

The hares occupied, for the most part, a different quarter of the wood from that in which he had hitherto dwelt. Many of those who had attended Merimel upon his first appearance were not wood hares at all, but came specially for the occasion from their forms in the open fields and gorse bushes in the neighbourhood. But with these Frank had no concern : his masters were the hares of the wood, in the thickest part of which they dwelt, and the boy's greatest trouble was how to move about in the dense thickets of brambles and brakes as quickly as he was ordered to do. Not only were the brakes thick and the brambles unpleasantly strong, but small stunted thorn trees grew here and there among them, and

wild honeysuckle twined and intertwined the thickets with an affectionate embrace, rendering it next to impossible for man or boy to force his way through the tangled mass before him. The hares, of course, could hop in and out as they liked, but it was foolish if not cruel of them to expect and require Frank to follow them, and the attempt naturally resulted in repeated failures on his part, accompanied by many severe scratches upon face and hands, not to speak of divers rents in his garments inflicted by the thorns and briars, which very properly resented in their own way this uncalled-for intrusion upon their privacy.

Otherwise, the duties imposed upon him by the hares were exceedingly easy. They were a careless, good-natured people, with few wants, and only desirous of being left alone, and allowed to play and gambol about as much as they liked, in doing which they expected their slave to join, and only laughed at his torn garments and scratched skin. But they were not unkind to him, and did not even require that he should gather their food, which they preferred to find for themselves in the shape of young green grass, and the tenderest shoots of the growing trees around them, with which I am afraid they played sad havoc. Take it altogether, Frank had no doubt in coming to the conclusion that this was the easiest work which he had yet had to do, and would not have been sorry to compound, and stay with the hares as long as he was obliged to be a slave at all. As the winter came on, the brambles, briars, brakes, and thorns would be less difficult to avoid, and the thick part of the wood would be as warm a place as he could hope to find.

This, however, was not to be. As the fifth month slowly waned away, he knew by the conversation of the hares that they fully expected to lose their slave. Prince Merimel, they said, always kept his word to the letter, and at the end of the five months he would undoubtedly return to the wood. Frank could only dimly conjecture what would then be his fate. The melancholy thought crossed his mind that he might possibly have to pass the next five months in a similar manner to the last, and he shrank with horror from the idea of having to recommence servitude with the rabbits in November, and reach the damp abode of the moorhens in the cold and cheerless month of February. However, he had, as we know, not the slightest clue whatever to the intentions of Prince Merimel, who had simply stated that at the end of the fifth month he should 'return and give fresh directions.'

As day by day wore on, poor Frank became greatly excited, and his heart beat fast as he dared to entertain some faint hope that by the slavery he had already undergone he might perhaps be held to have expiated the offence for which he had been condemned. The last day of the month at length arrived, and the hares, who for several previous days had been combing their whiskers with great care, brushing their clothes with unwonted assiduity, and smartening themselves by every means known to their elegant race, assembled at an early hour, prepared to meet the sovereign whom they so greatly loved and revered.

It was about ten o'clock before they perceived the vanguard of outlying hares who attended him in

his ordinary excursions, and heard the sound of the trumpets with which these faithful attendants heralded the arrival of their Prince. Close behind them followed the bodyguard of woodcocks, in the midst of whom appeared, as before, the milk-white hares drawing the chariot upon which Merimel stood upright.

- He drove into the open space before the oak under which Frank had first seen him, and there, according to orders previously given, the rabbits, squirrels, pheasants, moorhens, and wood hares had already assembled to meet him, and the latter animals had brought the slave-boy with them, to be dealt with as the Prince should see fit to direct. A right noble personage did Merimel look, as he proudly gazed upon his surrounding subjects, and his eye flashed with joy as, doubtless, he thought of their number, their loyalty, their devotion to himself, and the happiness which he and they alike felt in the relations subsisting between them.

Before he proceeded to other business he made special enquiry concerning the welfare of each of the nations of animals whose representatives were then assembled before him, and indeed of all the other winged and four-footed creatures within the wood. He asked if they had prospered since his last visit ; if the attacks of their natural enemies had been more or less frequent than usual ; of the consequent calamities which had fallen upon them in the loss of members of their respective tribes, and of the rate of sickness and mortality which had prevailed among them. He asked also as to the sufficiency of the supplies of food obtainable in the wood, and, in short, manifested a

great and creditable interest in all that appertained to the well-doing of those who acknowledged his authority as their lawful sovereign.

Then, turning to the leaders of the several tribes, he asked how the slave-boy had conducted himself, and whether he had given satisfaction to his different employers. The rabbits said they had found him rather stupid at first, but that he improved with scratching, and could carry a good armful of cabbages and other garden stuff when required. The squirrels made answer that he was a willing servant enough, but a poor climber at best. The pheasants said he was tolerable for a mere human being, though not very excellent ; but then what could you expect of a creature without wings, or even feathers ? The moorhens thought his objection to damp places and constantly standing in water greatly impaired his value as a slave, whilst the hares frankly owned that they had no fault to find with him except his inability to get through thickets sufficiently fast.

After he had heard all that the different animals had got to say, Prince Merimel turned to the boy, and regarded him in silence for a few moments, whilst he was apparently making up his mind as to the course he should take with regard to his young prisoner. This was a time of intense anxiety to Frank, as it will readily be believed, as upon the next few words of the prince might depend the whole comfort and happiness of his life for some time to come. At last the words came.

‘Man-child!’ said Merimel, so quickly and sharply that Frank almost jumped out of his shoes, which, by



the way, were so nearly worn out by the unwonted work to which they had been subjected for the last five months, that it would have been an easy matter to have stepped out of them without jumping at all ; 'man-child !' again said the Prince, with the same startling abruptness, 'you have served for five months the animals of the wood in which your deed of cruelty was perpetrated. You have now a different kind of servitude to undergo. You will serve me and my woodcocks until the five years to which I sentenced you are completed, unless I see occasion to change my mind in the meanwhile.'

At these words Frank could not restrain his tears, and amid his bitter sobs he endeavoured to plead for mercy, feeling indeed that he had been sufficiently punished for his crime. 'Oh, Prince,' he sobbed out, 'please let me off any more punishment ! Let me off just this once ! I've had such rough times in the wood, and I really never knew I was doing so wrong in killing the golden-crested wren. *Do* let me go back to my papa and mamma, and brothers and sisters. *Please* do ! I am so *very* sorry that I killed a wren, and indeed and indeed I *never* will do it again !'

'Do it again !' replied the Prince in an indignant tone ; 'I should just think not. At least I'll take pretty good care you don't have the chance of doing it for some time to come, *I* can tell you. Go back to your family, indeed ! You should have thought of that before you took your poor little innocent victim from out of the bosom of *his* family. Do you suppose *he* didn't wish to stop there ? But you never

gave him the offer. *His* family had to suffer by your cruel act, and it is only fair that you and *your* family should do the same. Follow me.'

So saying, the Prince gave the signal for departure, and poor Frank found himself obliged to run behind the chariot, in the midst of the woodcock bodyguard, who sedulously prodded him with their long bills whenever he appeared to be lagging. He had no time to fetch his rug, or even to say good-bye to any of his former masters, but passed through the wood without stopping once, crossed the embankment of the lake, and came into a wide tract of ground covered with fern and thorn trees. Up a track before them the party hastened at a fair pace, and so into an open space, beyond which was to be seen a line of oak trees which stood by the fence of the park—his father's own park, thought Frank, bitterly, and wondered how it was that his father seemed to have no power to help him, and that nobody had come to look for him during the whole time of his absence from home.

It was no use wondering, however, and he had other things to attend to besides, for the road was not very smooth, and he could not keep up with the hares very easily, even though they were encumbered with the weight of the chariot. On they went, over grass fields and ploughed land, the light chariot surmounting every obstacle, until at last they suddenly came to a grove of oak trees which Frank never remembered to have seen before, and in the middle of this grove was a large circular lake, and in the middle of the lake there seemed to be an island, and

upon the island was a turretted castle, as turretted a castle as you could have seen anywhere in any country that you have ever read of.

'Home!' shouted Merimel, as he pulled up on the shores of the lake; and then Frank perceived that there was a narrow strip of land which connected the island with the mainland. At the island end of this strip there was a high gate, through which was the entrance to the castle yard, and towards this advanced Prince Merimel and his train. When they came to the gate the Prince pulled up short, and standing erect in his chariot, pronounced three times the magic word 'Gashelauny!' upon which the great gate flew open, and the whole party entered the courtyard. Here the Prince alighted from his chariot, and went at once into the castle, leaving Frank with the attendants.

These paid no attention to him for a little while, until presently a woodcock, whom he had not seen before, but who had a piece of red tape tied round his neck to denote that he was the Prince's secretary, came flying out of one of the lower windows, and fluttering up to the boy, gave him a contemptuous peck on the tip of the nose, and said, 'The Prince says you are to groom the white hares and wash the chariot at once.'

Frank was filled with consternation. He had never groomed a horse or pony, much less a hare, in his life, and although he thought he could manage to wash the brass chariot, he felt the greatest repugnance and dread at the idea of possibly injuring one of the precious animals. So he stood silent for a moment,

upon which the woodcock administered a still sharper peck on the same place, and remarked, 'I have given you the Prince's orders; they had better be obeyed forthwith.'

Frank well knew that hesitation would be useless, and resistance still worse, so he determined to do his best, and to commence at once upon the hares. As soon as they heard the orders given, the attendant woodcocks instantly began to show the way to the stables, which were upon the left hand side of the courtyard, and hither Frank directly followed them. Seeing a pump in the yard, and pails not far off, he filled the latter at the former, seized a sponge which he perceived hanging just inside the stable door, and began to wash the first hare violently. The animal immediately squeaked out violently, which frightened Frank out of his life, for he made sure that it would bring the Prince back.

Instead of this, however, it only brought one of the woodcocks up to the spot, who, on seeing what was the matter, cried out at once to the boy, 'Oh, you stupid fellow! the Prince's hares are only washed with tepid rosewater, and there is a pump just inside the stable which is always kept exactly at the proper temperature.'

Thus admonished, Frank humbly thanked the woodcock, and, entering the stable, not only found the pump, but also a variety of combs and brushes which were evidently intended to be used in the process of grooming the royal hares. So he returned at once, and set about his business with much eagerness. How he managed it I cannot tell, not being clever at

such business myself, but the result was that he managed at last to get all the eight snow-white hares into a perfectly comfortable condition, and then put them into the stable, wherein each had a sumptuous loose box all to himself.

Then Frank turned to the brass chariot, and found that in washing that he was permitted to employ the ordinary water from the pump. He went to work without delay, and completed it after some little trouble. Just as he had done so, and was beginning to feel not only somewhat weary with all the exertions of the day, but more than somewhat hungry, he was startled by the loud ringing of a bell from one of the turrets of the castle, and almost immediately afterwards he saw the woodcocks trooping in from every quarter, and one of them observed to him as he passed, 'If you want any dinner, you had better come with us.'

Frank followed with trembling footsteps, for having now been a slave for more than five months, and having seen that the woodcocks served in the high and honourable position of bodyguard to the sovereign, he felt that it might be deemed presumptuous of him to enter together with them. However, no one raised any objection, and as his hunger was so great that it was perfectly necessary for him to have something to eat as soon as possible, he overcame his timidity and marched in with the rest.

The sight which met his eyes was one very reassuring to a hungry man or boy. There was a table at the end of a beautifully shaped dining-room, and this table was literally groaning with refreshments of

a tempting kind, and especially so to a boy who had subsisted for the last few months principally upon wild strawberries, nuts, a few truffles which he had been fortunate enough to dig up, and such vegetables as he could manage to get for himself and cook as well as he was able. Now and then, it is true, he had been allowed a few slices of ham, from some stores which Prince Merimel had left in the wood, with permission to the slave-boy to be thus regaled when it was absolutely necessary for his health. Nevertheless, the supply had been so small that the poor fellow quite pined for meat, and here he perceived plenty of meat, and fresh meat, too.

There were mutton chops, beef-steaks, and kidneys upon the table, not to mention butter and honey in plenty, bread, rolls, and cake sufficient for a dozen people, and likewise generous wine and humming ale in abundance. And seated at the table in a marble chair, with all his regal dignity about him, was the mighty Prince whose slave Frank had become. But he was not alone. Other figures, also made of bronze to all appearance, were seated at his right and left, and below them on each side were figures which seemed to be made of marble, alabaster, and ivory. They were of different sizes, and in different positions; some standing upright, some sitting, some lolling on sofas, but all close to the table, all seemingly alive, and all paying the most respectful and marked deference to the great Prince Merimel.

But this was not all. Down each side of the room were long tables, covered with food for the sustenance of the bodyguard. This food was not equally inviting

to the eyes of poor Frank, for it consisted of earth, damp earth, covered with a light coating of grass, and apparently just taken up from some marsh or swampy ground ; nevertheless, something there was which suited the woodcocks' taste, for they plunged their bills into it with avidity and delight, and seemed to be thoroughly enjoying their meal. Frank hesitated in the doorway, uncertain what he was to do, and feeling very much afraid that, at the very best, he should only be asked to share the repast of the bodyguards, which would in fact be equivalent to condemning him to starvation.

This, however, was not the case. Prince Merimel looked up from his breakfast and exclaimed in his usual voice, 'Man-child !'

Frank came humbly forward on hearing himself thus addressed, and his master thus continued. 'Slave,' he said, 'we know that you cannot live upon the food of the birds, and you will require meat in order that you may perform your work in a proper manner. You will therefore be allowed to eat at the foot of our table.'

As the Prince spoke he pointed to a seat towards the lower end of the table, and here Frank seated himself accordingly, with no one very close to him, though some ivory chessmen, larger than the common size, were eating at no great distance, and a marble flower-girl, as she seemed, was only a few places above him. When Frank had taken his seat, some one (he could not tell who), placed before him a dish of mutton chops, and for a few minutes he forgot everything else, and devoted himself to appeasing an

appetite which was really becoming ravenous. When he had come to a little pause in his eating he saw a glass of beer standing temptingly near him, and found no difficulty in disposing of it forthwith. Then he began to look around him a little, and the first thing that struck him was the perfect grace and symmetry which characterised all the figures about him. They were beautifully, exquisitely made, and as he looked at them again and again, he could not help fancying that he had seen something like them, or at all events like some of them, at another period of his existence. Where could it have been, and what could *they* be?

Then suddenly it flashed across him that they bore a marked resemblance to the models of famous statues which his father, during many tours and journeys, had collected and placed in his library. Yes; there certainly was the marble statuette of the Apollino, the original of which, he had been told, was in the Tribune of the Uffizi Palace at Florence. Near to it was a statue of the same material exactly like the Venus de' Medici in the same place, only she was smiling and talking and full of life, which no real statue could well be. Several he also recognised, which, he had been told, were taken from celebrated statues in the Pitti Palace, and in fact Florence was altogether well represented in the assembly. But as he looked further on, he was struck with the wonderful resemblance which a bronze figure immediately on the right of Prince Merimel bore to the faun of the Capitol at Rome; and, on looking closely at the Prince himself, that potentate struck him forcibly as being certainly own brother to the Apollo of the Vatican. His



attitude, the nobility stamped upon his features, and his magnificent appearance altogether, brought the statue—or rather the copy of it which he had seen—so vividly to Frank's mind, that he could hardly prevent himself from giving vent to an exclamation of surprise. But, on the whole, he thought it best to keep silent, not being very sure what the consequences of a heedless speech might be, and having been completely puzzled by the ideas which had thus suddenly arisen in his mind, sensibly took refuge in another mutton chop, and felt all the better for it.

His appetite had been tolerably well satisfied, and he consequently felt in much better spirits, when the loud, clear tones of Prince Merimel again sent a thrill through his bosom. 'Man-child,' said the Prince, 'can you dance?'

'A little,' timidly replied Frank, for he had walked through a quadrille several times with his sisters, and one of them had taken him for a turn or two in a waltz more than once.

'Then,' said the Prince, 'you shall have the honour of dancing before this company. Begin immediately!'

Frank was both astonished and confused at receiving this command, and hardly knew what he ought to say or do. Moreover, he had always been told—and indeed his own feelings showed him—that to dance about immediately after you have eaten a heavy meal is by no means a wholesome process. Still, he would have begun at once (such was his terror of the Prince) had he known exactly how. One can't very well dance a quadrille alone, and similar difficulties exist

with regard to a waltz. So at first the boy sat still and did nothing.

'Well, slave, when are you going to begin?' impatiently demanded the Prince.

'Please, sir,' said Frank.

'You will be good enough to say "Your Majesty" when you address me,' interrupted the Prince, with a supercilious air.

'Please your Majesty,' continued Frank, correcting himself hurriedly, 'who is to be my partner, and who will play the music?'

'Partner!' cried the Prince; 'you don't want any partner, or, if you do, that marble flower-girl shall dance with you; and as for music, our band shall furnish that in a moment. There is a Dancing Faun here who thinks no one can dance but himself, and I want to see whether you cannot beat him. Now then; go on!'

At the same moment the attendants blew the silver trumpets, and some invisible musicians struck up a lively tune. Seeing that the Prince was really determined that he should dance, and that the flower-girl had risen and was bowing to him in the middle of the room, where there was a large space between the tables, Frank thought he had better make the best of it, and accordingly left his seat, stood opposite his partner and made the best bow that he could. But the music was neither a waltz nor a quadrille, and the steps which the flower-girl danced were quite different from those which his sisters practised. She came forward, bending her body hither and thither after a most graceful fashion, keeping time with the music,

and, now slow, now fast, ever moving as it varied. Frank thought he had better do something, so he jumped about opposite her, and twisted himself about as well as he could, and did his best to make up in vehemence of action for his shortcomings in elegant postures and graceful bearing.

But after the two had gone on for a very short time, the Prince rose from his chair in manifest wrath. 'The man-child is an impostor!' he cried. 'He can't dance a bit! The Dancing Faun is worth half-a-dozen of such fellows!'

And then he called out for the music to stop, and told the marble flower-girl that she was a great deal too good to dance with such a booby as that slave. Next he turned to Frank, who stood there trembling in his shoes, and asked him what he had meant by pretending he could dance when he plainly had no more notion of it than a cow? Frank humbly replied that he hadn't meant *that* kind of dancing, and had done his best.

'What is the use of doing your best when your best is as bad as that?' retorted the Prince. 'However, if you can't dance, perhaps you can sing?'

'A very little, please your Majesty,' replied the boy.

'Then sing that very little at once,' returned the other. 'Strike up, and let us have no nonsense about it.'

Thus commanded, Frank thought he had better begin at once, and struck up, in as good a voice as he could manage to summon so soon after dinner, 'The

Bay of Biscay, oh !' But as soon as he got to the words

'There she lay, all that day,  
In the Bay of Biscay, oh !'

The Prince interrupted him in a sharp tone of voice.

'That's nonsense!' he cried. '*Who* lay? The ship? Hens lay, not ships, and no hen was ever fool enough to go on laying all that day or any other day that any person of common sense ever heard of. And why the "bay" of Biscay more than the "brown" of Biscay, or the "chestnut" of Biscay, I should like to know? And what a ridiculous thing to end your song with a great "Oh!" as if somebody had just pinched you. I don't call that much of a song; don't you know anything more lively and amusing?'

Frank thought a little while, and then struck up 'Rule, Britannia!' to which all the company listened with the deepest attention until he came to the chorus,

Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!' when the Prince instantly broke in. 'That's a fib!' he said; 'that's a palpable fib! You're a Briton, you see, and you're a slave, too, sure enough, so the fellow who wrote that song didn't know anything about the matter. But to tell the truth,' added he, 'it is my opinion that you sing very little better than you dance. I wonder, man-child, whether your education has been totally and utterly neglected. Can you do sums?'

'A little,' answered Frank, timidly.

'A little!' exclaimed the Prince. 'Why, you only seem to be able to do a little of everything, and that

about as badly as it *can* be done. Let us try you in the sums. Now for some addition. Add five glasses of water to five seidlitz powders, and how many does it make?’

‘Ten,’ said Frank, quickly; upon which Prince Merimel frowned.

‘Not a bit of it,’ he remarked. ‘Though I don’t know whether you mean ten glasses of water or ten powders. But there would be only five of either, because the five seidlitz powders would be melted in the water, and foam don’t count. Now then, subtraction. Take five eggs from under a blackbird, and what remains?’

‘Only the blackbird herself,’ answered Frank.

‘Fool!’ cried the Prince; ‘only the nest would remain, I should say. The blackbird would fly away, unless she was a born idiot. Now let me try you in something else. If potatoes cost fifteen shillings a sack, how many quinces should go to an apple tart?’

This question entirely puzzled Frank, who looked towards the Prince without saying a word, until his questioner again spoke. ‘I see,’ said he, ‘that you know scarcely anything at all, and are in fact very little better than a dunce. I hardly know whether I shall be able to keep such an ignoramus in my house. Still let me give you one more trial. If wheat is forty-five shillings the quarter, how long will it take two men to mow an acre of barley?’

Of course Frank could return no answer to a question so utterly absurd, and he felt greatly inclined to tell the Prince that there *was* no answer, but, having already had experience of his power, he thought it best

to remain silent, and bear as well as he could the imputation of being a dunce. This, however, did not satisfy his tormentor, who asked him haughtily what he meant by not answering, and told him that if he showed any signs of sulkiness he should dine at the woodcocks' table next day, and have no other food than that provided for those worthy birds.

Horried at the prospect of such an unpleasant change, Frank humbly represented to his royal master that he was most anxious to do all that was required of him. 'Please your Majesty,' he said, 'I really would have answered the last questions if I could, but nobody ever taught me such things at school. Mr. Switcher taught quite different things.'

'Then,' said the Prince, solemnly, 'Mr. Switcher ought to be "switched" himself, and so he should be if I had him here. But what did Mr. Switcher teach you?'

'Latin, and such things,' answered Frank, modestly.

'Well,' said Prince Merimel, 'I don't know much about "such things," which must be a science by itself, of which I never heard; but as for Latin, I can try you in that language without any trouble. Now then, "*Arma virumque cano*." What does that mean?'

'Arms and the man I sing,' began Frank.

'Nonsense!' cried the Prince. '"I hit a man over the arms with my cane;" that's the *true* translation, as you may know by the sound—there is a great deal in sound, you know, when you come to think of it. But let us try again. How do you construe this passage? "*Mors omnibus est communis*."'

‘Death is the common lot of all,’ replied Frank, confidently.

‘Didn’t I tell you to attend to the sound?’ angrily rejoined the Prince. ‘What you have said may have sense, but has no sound at all resembling the original. The true translation is, “Mr. Morse commonly ate his meals on the top of an omnibus.” But it is evident that your education has been sadly neglected, and this makes me think that, after all, the crime which you have committed in the wood may have been partly caused by ignorance. If so I might be disposed to remit some part of your sentence.’

At these words Frank felt a thrill of joy enter his heart, and he threw himself at once on his knees.

‘Oh, please do let me go home!’ he cried out in a plaintive voice; ‘I really didn’t know it was such a crime. I am so very sorry.’

‘Sorry for what?’ interposed the Prince; ‘for having killed the innocent bird, or for having been punished for it?’

‘For both, please your Majesty,’ replied the boy.

‘Well,’ said the Bronze Prince, ‘that is at all events honest, and I like honesty in boys as well as men. I will consult my friends here as to what shall be done in the matter.’ So saying, Prince Merimel turned to the Venus near him, and asked her whether she thought the man-child had done enough penance for his sin. But the Venus was so much engaged in holding her hands in the most graceful manner before her, and putting her head in the most becoming attitude, that she only remarked that she really had not the time to give her attention to such matters.

So the Prince, smiling upon the lovely creature as he received her answer, turned to the Apollino and demanded his opinion. Carelessly throwing up his right arm and placing his hand upon the back of his head, the Apollino declared that he thought there was much to be said on both sides ; that besides the crime of slaughtering the wren, the boy had been guilty of deserting the noble long-bow of ancient times for the more destructive but ignoble crossbow ; but that, on the whole, he would rather not interfere.

Then Prince Merimel next accosted the faun, and requested him to determine the question. The faun was standing up, leaning his right arm upon a marble pedestal, whilst his left arm rested gracefully upon his hip. His head was bent a little forward, and his face had an expression of good-humoured, friendly feeling towards everybody, which filled the heart of the listening boy with hope and expectation. Nor was he disappointed in the result. It was not, indeed, expressed in any lengthy argument upon the general merits of the question at issue, nor accompanied by any strong manifestation of feeling or interest. On the contrary, the speech of the faun was, to say the least of it, laconic, but at the same time, very much to the purpose.

'I should let the chap go,' was all he said, with an inexpressibly genial look upon his face as he said it.

Hardly was the sentence out of his mouth, and scarcely had Prince Merimel uttered in reply the magic words 'All right,' when a tremendous clap of thunder drowned all speech and indeed all other sound in the place. In one instant every creature in the room



faded away and disappeared. Prince Merimel, the faun, the Apollino, the Venus, the flower-girl, woodcocks, and everybody and everything else, vanished so completely that there was not a vestige left of any of them; and Frank rubbed his eyes once and again in astonishment, as he stood gazing around him and wondering what had happened.

He found himself once more under the oak tree in front of which the rabbits, squirrels, and other animals had ranged themselves, and where his first interview with Prince Merimel had taken place. No animals were there now, but a tremendous thunder-storm was going on, doubtless the very same whose thunder had been the signal for the departure and disappearance of the Prince, with his friends and palace. The loud claps of thunder still continued, and large, heavy drops of rain began to fall. By Frank's side lay his cross-bow, restored to him by some miraculous means, and there, too, lay his handkerchief; but, as if to prove the reality of what had occurred, *the body of the golden-crested wren was gone*. Frank well knew what had become of it, but he was too thankful at the moment to think much about it at all. He felt that he was once more free again, and lost no time in using that freedom to quit the wood and return to his father's house.

I do not know how his family received him, or in what manner they accounted for his long absence. The woodpecker had no means of knowing these things, for he could not have got into that house with any certainty of ever getting out again, and therefore preferred, upon the whole, to stay where he was. He did hear, however, he told me, from a wandering nuthatch,

that there was some talk of the family not having thought Frank's absence to have been really as long as *we* know it was, and of their having thrown some doubt upon the reality of some part of the adventures he had gone through. But this is often the way of grown-up people in dealing with children's affairs, and, said the woodpecker, there wasn't a bird in any part of that country who didn't know perfectly the entire truth of the history.

Indeed, it was tolerably well proved by what subsequently followed. Frank never shot a golden-crested wren again! He grew up remarkably fond of animals, and most kind and gentle in his treatment of them. And, after his return to his father's house, one of the first things he did was to go to the library, where stood the models of the very statues which had been with their friend Prince Merimel in the palace of the latter. Then, and often afterwards, he looked carefully and closely at each of them : he addressed them again and again, but without eliciting a single word from any of them, and as he gazed upon the faun, whose kindness had set him free, the tears came into his eyes, and he vowed that henceforth he would hold that gem of the Capitol to be the most beautiful statue in Rome, and that every time he saw it, or indeed any of the other statues which had been present upon that important occasion of his life, he would feel the better and happier for the sight, and would be encouraged to strive still more earnestly to lead a good and pure life, loving the animals which the Great God has sent to beautify and enliven His world, and never wantonly inflicting pain upon anything of His creation.

*BILLY'S STORY.*

EVERY Kentish boy or girl who has been educated at all, is perfectly well aware of the fact that there are five quarters of the globe; viz. Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and Romney Marsh. It is of events which happened years and years ago upon the borders of the last-mentioned quarter that I wish to speak. It is undeniably the smallest of the five, since, from Rye at one end to Hythe at the other, it only contains between forty and fifty thousand acres, but it is none the less famous both for the quality of its soil and the character of its inhabitants. As regards the latter, 'As cunning as a marshman,' is a well-known proverb in East Kent, whilst no one who has any experience in such matters will deny for a moment the value of the former. The pasture land is frequently let for three pounds or three pounds ten shillings per acre, and for a still larger sum when it happens to be situate near the towns of Romney and Lydd, or the ancient hamlet of Dymchurch, whilst the crops grown upon that portion of the land which is arable astonish the stranger by their magnificence in quality as well as quantity.

From Hythe to Rye runs that celebrated canal by

which Mr. Pitt thought to impose an impassable barrier between the French and the inland country, when in the latter part of the last and the early part of the present century, England thought it necessary to be constantly interfering with the internal affairs of France and other countries, and consequently had upon her hands a perpetual continental war. The French never came, however, and if they had, would have been very unlikely to have landed in Romney Marsh. If fate had induced a hostile army to do so at any time, they would probably have laughed at the canal, and have found very little difficulty in crossing it. But they would not have laughed at the heights on the land side of the canal, which are and were a very different matter.

At a short distance from Hythe the hill begins which forms the natural defence of the coast until you come beyond Aldington Knoll, and any invader who advanced from the Marsh would have found a serious obstacle in his way if the ground had been properly held from the Knoll to Lympne Castle. From this high land you look down upon the flat, even surface of Romney Marsh, with its silver lining of sea. Indeed you have a finer view than of the Marsh itself alone, for, as you look towards it, far away on your right are the hills above Hastings, and further back, in the distance, you catch a glimpse of that celebrated steeple at Tenterden which is believed by some to have been the mysterious cause of the Goodwin Sands, whilst to your left you see as far as the white cliffs beyond Dover near to the South Foreland.

And if you are standing on ground high enough

for the view which lies behind you, turn round and look upon a sight fair indeed to see, for the whole vale from Hythe to Ashford lies spread out before you, bounded by the great chalk hills, the backbone of Kent, of which I have spoken so often. There are the woods of Sandling Park, the tall trees of Monks-horton close under the hill, the pleasant pastures of Brabourne, with Sellinge, and Smeeth, and the Rook-toll and rich meadows of Scott's Hall intervening, and between you and Scott's Hall the old church of Aldington, forming a landmark conspicuous to half that side of the country. Beyond these again comes Mersham church, standing out boldly against the horizon, and behind it the territory of Mersham Hatch, whilst Brook and Wye lie beyond (the latter town nestling in under the chalk hills), and the grand old trees of Eastwell Park bound your view on the north-west, stretching down towards old Ashford town, beyond which you can see as far as the woods of Godinton and Hothfield in the distance.

It is, indeed, a lovely scene for mortal eye to look upon, and it is scarcely to be wondered at if eyes other than those of mortals should have sometimes cared to gaze on the beauties of such a country, and if beings who were permitted to roam where they pleased over this world of ours, should have selected for their occasional abode a locality so exceedingly desirable. No one, therefore, will be surprised to hear that all kinds of strange creatures have, from time immemorial, been seen and heard of in the immediate neighbourhood of Romney Marsh. Ghosts have always been so common there, that the inhabi-

tants think nothing of them ; witches are, and always have been, to be found in plenty ; and fairies have made the district their place of resort for centuries.

But William Dawson, the son of the honest farmer who occupied the Lympne Castle farm in those days, declared that the old ruins of the castle were possessed by all three ; that ghosts flitted there every night of the year, that witches from time to time held their appointed meetings within the ruins, and that it was occupied by fairies continually. Farmer Dawson's house was only at a short distance from the ruins, which were of course easily accessible to his son. Out of respect for the poor fellow I have called him William Dawson, but I do not suppose he was actually ever so called in his life. 'Will,' or 'Bill,' would have been his usual appellation under ordinary circumstances, but, not being over bright intellectually, it must be confessed that he generally went by the name of 'Silly Billy.' Very likely he was silly as the world holds silliness to be. He knew right from wrong though, and had an instinctive horror of the latter which many of those who jeered at him would have done well to emulate.

Nothing would have induced Billy to take anything which did not belong to him, and if he was superstitious, and believed in a great many things which ordinary people deemed foolish and absurd, he had together with the superstition a deep reverence for everything holy, which might well have served as an example to wiser folk. And who shall say that much, if not all of what Billy fancied he saw and heard, was not actually heard and seen by him ? May

it not be that a compensation may have been given for the partial deprivation of intellect, in the capacity of seeing, hearing, and understanding things and beings that to others were invisible, inaudible, and unintelligible. These are mysteries which we cannot penetrate, but so much as this is certainly true, that in Billy's case his dreams or visions, or whatever our superior wisdom chooses to call them, were a real pleasure to him. He loved to wander abroad in the pale moonlight, and would bring home such stories to his old parents as used at first to terrify them out of their wits. But, by degrees, they got used to them, and as Billy was their only child, and it gave him such pleasure to ramble about, they put no restraint upon him, suffered him to wander forth when and where he would, and listened with loving indulgence to all his wild and romantic stories.

Then, in the warm summer days, Billy would often sit on the side of the hill overlooking the 'marsh,' and dream for hours together of the spirit-world and of all the strange beings he had seen or fancied.

Lympne Castle was a very old ruin ; which people, gifted with the usual amount of intellect, did not care to approach after night-fall, and Lympne Park, as the large wood on the side of the hill was called, had also no very good reputation among ordinary people. So much the better for Billy, for his wanderings were all the more undisturbed, and these two places were second homes to the poor boy. Lympne Park, indeed, was a paradise to him in the warm weather, and therein he roamed day after day, gathering flowers and enjoying the shade of the great

old trees which overhung the low brushwood. Then, sometimes, he would steal out on the west side of the wood, where lay the pasture fields, sloping down towards the marsh, and sit on the wood hedge looking over into the meadows to watch for the Fairies. Strange tales he brought home of the Elfin dances which he had witnessed on these occasions ; how the little beings would peer forth from their hiding places under bushes or tufts of grass, to see if anybody was watching them, and when they thought the coast was clear, would join hand in hand and dance round and round until they had made a good Fairy ring, the marks of which any mortal might trace afterwards.

He would tell, too, of their merry sports and gambols and the different shapes in which they sometimes appeared, until his old parents would open their eyes in astonishment, and marvel at what they supposed to be his strange powers of imagination. They did not discourage him to talk, however, for it seemed to give him much pleasure to do so, and did nobody any harm. So matters stood, and so time slipped away until Billy had numbered some twenty years, and his father and mother were both well advanced in life.

As he grew older, the boy by no means relaxed his attentions to the Fairies, or swerved in his attachment to the wood and castle. And although some of the tales which he told on his return from these localities did doubtless seem to be wild and fanciful, yet the events which I am about to relate will convince the impartial reader that after all there was much of truth and reality blended with poor Billy's romance. Where the truth ends and at what point the romance



begins must be determined by others for themselves, and as much of the narrative could only have been gathered from Billy's own lips, it is hardly safe to speculate upon such a difficult question.

Late one evening he had strayed up to the castle about sunset, and perched himself upon a fragment of the old crumbling wall, from whence he could command a view over the marsh stretching widely below him, and just visible in the fast-fading twilight. His back was to the old castle court as he sat, and so he remained for some time gazing and dreaming as was his wont. Suddenly, his attention was attracted by a noise behind him, and turning his head sharply round, he perceived two figures approaching each other from either side of the court. One of these was a gentleman and the other a lady, but each appeared to Billy to be of exalted rank, judging by the richness of their apparel and their general bearing, which was evidently that of persons accustomed to refinement and luxury. The lady was covered with lace and diamonds, her feet and hands were remarkably small, and her features exceedingly beautiful. The gentleman was clad in black velvet, upon which glittered several stars and orders, which were apparently enriched with precious stones, and shone with great brilliancy. The pair slowly advanced towards each other, stopped, bowed, and then began to dance a dance which was new and strange to Billy, but was probably the old-fashioned minuet.

As they commenced, music proceeded from the interior of the court; who the musicians might be, Billy could not tell, but it was strange, weird music,





**BILLY'S AMAZEMENT AT THE DANCERS IN THE CASTLE COURT**

the tones of which were indescribably sweet, and to its accompaniment the gentleman and lady danced with wondrous grace. They advanced and retreated, swept round each other, back to back, and then faced again, throwing their limbs and bodies into fantastic yet elegant attitudes, and ever moving with easy dignity. Billy looked on in amazement and delight, both of which feelings were increased when, at the cessation of the music, the pair made each other a low bow, and then, at a signal which the gentleman gave to the invisible minstrels, the music recommenced, but in different and more lively strains, and at the same moment a number of persons suddenly appeared, as if issuing from the walls on each side, and began merrily to dance around the first couple, who stood calmly looking on.

Billy gazed with renewed interest upon these performers, who exerted themselves mightily, and danced with much vigour. Their dresses were varied and curious, and appeared to be those of persons of various ranks and employments. Some wore smart military uniforms, others garments such as Billy fancied must commonly be worn in the presence of kings at their courts; some were dressed in plain evening attire, some appeared as common sailors on shore for a holiday, some as labourers in their Sunday best, and among them were several figures in the garbs of priests and nuns, dancing away for all the world as merrily as the best. The whole party cut the strangest capers, and indulged in the most fantastic gambols, twisting their bodies into the strangest contortions, throwing their arms and legs wildly about, and evi-

dently doing their best to obtain the approbation of the first couple, who, all the time, stood smiling and bowing in the midst.

Billy watched these proceedings with much interest for a considerable time, when all at once, when the merriment was at its height, the stroke of a large bell rang through the air with sudden and startling sound. It was a clanging, piercing stroke, which went through and through the listener's head, and made his ears ring and tingle for some seconds afterwards. Only a single stroke it was, but its effect was instantaneous. The music ceased immediately, and the dancers, one and all, vanished as completely and entirely as if the earth had opened her mouth and swallowed them up. Not a sign or trace of them was left, and Billy could scarcely believe his own eyes as he looked earnestly upon the place where they had lately been standing. But he was not left to look and wonder long, or, rather, his wonder was required for something else before he had time to make up his mind as to what had become of the merry revellers.

The loud sound of the bell had hardly ceased to reverberate before another bell rang, with a quick, tinkling sound, and directly there issued from the corner of the court-yard a procession of monks in their brown garments, walking two and two in a grave solemn manner. They crossed the court and disappeared under an archway on the other side, and immediately after them came others clad in black and white, and, anon, still more, dressed in gray ; and all silently crossed and disappeared before the eyes of the wondering Billy, who had no idea that there were so

many persons of religious orders, alive or dead, in the neighbourhood. After the last monk had disappeared, all was still and silent, and Billy waited in vain for some little time, hoping that somebody or something else would come into sight and furnish him with amusement. For, somehow or other, up to this night of which we are speaking, the lad had never felt frightened at any of the strange sights and sounds which he had seen and heard, but had only gathered from them great interest and amusement. He was, however, destined to experience a different feeling to-night for the first time.

After he had waited in anxious expectation for a few minutes, he began to find his position irksome and unprofitable. The twilight had passed away, and the flickering rays of the moon only lit up the old castle walls with a dim, uncertain light, sometimes obscured by the clouds, and then again suddenly shining forth. Billy had no longer the view of the marsh to attract him, and presently thought that he would try whether, on the other hand, he could not see some more of the sights within the walls which had so lately engaged his attention. So he scrambled down from his place amid the old ruins, and stood in the courtyard where the dancers had just been performing. Here was rough grass, among which were interspersed old pieces of stone from the crumbling ruins, and all bore a wild and unkempt appearance.

Billy stood still for a moment and listened. Nothing was to be heard or seen of those who had so lately occupied the place upon which he was standing, and he paused a moment, doubtful as to the direction

in which he should turn his steps. At that instant a slight sound fell upon his ear, a low, rumbling sound as if of thunder at a distance, but thunder which, to his infinite surprise, seemed to come from below instead of from above his head, whence, in his short experience, he had usually found thunder to proceed. He listened still more attentively, and again hearing the noise, crept quietly to the left-hand corner of the courtyard, from whence the sound could be heard more distinctly. An old, broken-down wall was immediately before him, and by clambering up upon this, which he did with as little noise as possible, Billy could see over into another inner court of the old castle, which in point of wildness and ruinous condition had little to distinguish it from that in which he had lately stood. One end of this court approached the edge of the hill on the east or Hythe side of the castle, and immediately below its outer wall the ground was steep and precipitous.

On the other side the same kind of rough stone wall separated the court or room from that part of the castle which was somewhat less ruinous, and in the western angle of the court were the remains of what had formerly been a large well, the mouth of which was now half blocked up by bricks and stones, amid which coarse grass and nettles grew and thrived in abundance. On the side immediately opposite Billy (who, it must be remembered, climbed up and looked down from the south side), several fragments of masonry stood out here and there in the court, which had doubtless formed part of walls and partitions upon which time had long since wrought its

work of ruin, and which now only blocked up the court, and somewhat impeded the view of anyone who gazed upon the place from Billy's position.

As he gazed and listened, the boy at first saw and heard nothing more than he had done when standing in the outer court. Almost immediately, however, the rumbling, thunder-like noise was resumed, and that louder than before. Billy anxiously peered into the semi-darkness of the place, and was presently rewarded by seeing a dusky figure emerge from behind a huge piece of stone-work near the east corner. The figure, so far as the looker-on could see, was clad in the ordinary garments of mankind, and was directly followed by two companions. They stood for a moment and then appeared to be engaged in hauling up from the earth some heavy substance, for which they seemed to be employing ropes such as common mortals would use for such a purpose, and to be assisted by some invisible friends who were apparently below the earth. This, Billy judged by the sound of their voices. For, unlike the dancers whom he had recently watched, and who had maintained amidst all their antics a profound silence, the new-comers spoke, although their tones were low, and although it was Billy's opinion that their language was English, he could make out none of their words.

Presently, the three first figures seemed to have succeeded in that which they had been attempting, and some large, long, round substance was hauled, pulled, and pushed forward from behind the stone-work. Immediately afterwards, two other figures appeared with it, and all five began to drag and push



it along the side of the wall opposite Billy. The imperfect light so much interfered with his view, that although he was scarce a dozen or fourteen yards from the actors in this scene, the boy could not make out sufficient to content his fast rising curiosity, and he therefore somewhat shifted his position upon the wall so as to peer further forward into the semi-obscurity.

As he did so, a loose stone dropped from the wall, and in falling made some little noise. Unluckily, as fate would have it, the figures were at that moment stopping, as human beings might have done, as if out of breath, and the sound fell distinctly upon their ears. They started, turned to see from whence it came, and as the rays of the moon happened at that instant to be partially unobscured by clouds, they caught sight of the mortal intruder upon their mysterious performances. They bent forward at once and whispered together, and then one of them, leaving the others, came straight towards the wall upon which the boy sat. He had, as I have said, a dress differing in nothing material from that worn by mankind in general, and, in fact, as he came nearer to Billy, the latter, had he been a sharp-witted and observant boy, might have remarked that the overcoat which he wore was not unlike a common white gaberdine, such as was usually worn by the peasants in that neighbourhood, and which had nothing especially remarkable in its appearance.

But Billy looked at these things with eyes other than those of the common run of men, and to him the dirty white gaberdine, if such the garment was, seemed in the moonlight to be a kind of ghostly

clothing which hung loosely about its spirit owner, and endued the latter with strange and mysterious powers. Nor was this idea lessened by the manner in which the spirit acted. As he crossed the court towards the place where Billy sat, he lifted his hands above his head and shook his garment before him; then he broke from a walk into a run, or rather trot, and as he came on he broke into a veritable roar, which to the boy's excited mind appeared to express rage and fury which was anything but reassuring to one of timid disposition.

Now Billy, as I have said, had never yet experienced fear at any of the strange scenes which he had witnessed, and the wondrous beings he had encountered in his moonlight rambles. He had looked upon them as companions and friends, and although he had never ventured upon speaking to them, felt highly privileged at being permitted to witness their proceedings. But here was another state of affairs altogether. The present party certainly appeared to resent his intrusion upon their amusements, and the figure which was approaching him was certainly animated by no kindly intentions. In fact, to say the truth, his roar was terrible in the ears of Billy, who for the first time in his life felt very much afraid of the possible result to himself of this night's adventure.

His fear may be excused, moreover, from the circumstance of his being so entirely taken by surprise at the conduct of the spirit, differing so remarkably from that of all the other creatures whom he had chanced to encounter. Fear, at any rate, crept into poor Billy's heart, and as the creature approached

nearer, and still roared in the same awful manner, he slipped over the wall, back into the outer courtyard, and fairly took to his heels. Not, however, to escape so easily; he heard the figure scramble up the wall which he had just left, as if intent upon vengeance, and turning his head as he neared the outer wall, saw it still in pursuit, shaking its garment and roaring as it advanced.

Unhappy Billy! from that moment a new era in his life commenced, and his love of the spirit world, so long the comfort and solace of his days and nights, was checked and tempered by that fear which is so often experienced by ordinary people. He turned his head, I say, as he ran, and in doing so struck his foot against a stone and fell forward, flat on his face. Hastily, he strove to rise, but even as he did so, he felt what he took to be the gigantic claw of some dreadful demon seize his shoulder with a cruel grip. Poor Billy gave one shriek, buried his face in his hands, and yielded himself up to instant and utter despair. With that touch and with what immediately followed, the dreams of his young life vanished, his confidence in spirits and fairies passed away, and doubts, misgivings, and trembling dread seized upon his hitherto fearless soul.

But it was not only the touch which alarmed him, a voice at the same moment rang in his ears, uttering words which to his excited imagination appeared to be spoken in tones sufficiently awful to chill the blood and freeze the marrow of any human being who might have had the misfortune to hear them. Yet the voice was not only similar in every respect to a human

voice, but the words were spoken in his own language, and even in the very idiom of his own county and neighbourhood. For this was what the figure said, as it clawed hold of Billy's prostrate form, and bent over his trembling body.

'Look ye here, my covey! This here won't do, nohows. I're a ghost, I are, a reg'lar old ghost, and I won't have you a rampaging up in my old place, of a night! Just you look out, for if I catches you up here again a watching o' me and my mates, blessed if I don't eat ye!'

This was all the ghost either said or did to the unfortunate Billy, but it was quite enough. He lay perfectly still, shivering all over, for some seconds after these words had been uttered, and did not venture to lift up his head until he thought that the terrible creature which had overtaken him must certainly have departed. Then he crept rather than rose to his feet, and without casting a glance behind him, rushed to the outer wall, through the breach at which he had first been sitting, out upon the open hill, and away home as fast as possible.

Breathless and trembling he darted into his father's house, just as the worthy couple were preparing to retire for the night. Astonished at his unwonted appearance and affrighted look, they questioned him as to the cause, but for some time without obtaining any reply save incoherent moans and sobs. But his mother's kind voice and gentle manner at length wrung from poor Billy sundry disjointed words and sentences which told the anxious enquirers where and how he had received the nervous shock from which he was

evidently suffering. They ascertained the fact that he had been severely frightened in the old castle ruins, by what the poor fellow called, a 'great ghostacy,' and, little by little, they obtained from him some kind of account of what had passed.

The old people were much surprised at what they heard, first because they had never known their son to have been alarmed by any of the supernatural beings whom he professed to have seen, and with whom he always stated himself to be on the most friendly terms; and, secondly, because they had never heard of a ghost seizing hold of a mortal with such a fierce squeeze as Billy declared had been inflicted upon him. That evening, however, the worthy pair devoted themselves to soothing the agitation of their affrighted offspring, and packed him off to bed as soon as they could.

But for the first time in his innocent life Billy passed an unquiet and restless night. Unpleasant dreams disturbed his slumbers; he tossed fitfully to and fro in his bed, now and again started up with a sudden cry of horror, and was unmistakeably thankful when daylight re-appeared. His father and mother questioned him more closely in the morning, but could make nothing more of his story, and would perhaps have forgotten it themselves, but that they could not help observing the change which had come over the lad. He was no longer merry and sociable as before. An air of timidity was visible about him, and a melancholy seemed to have stolen upon him, quite different from his former character. He wandered about less than of old, and, instead of doing so, hung listlessly

about the farm-yard, looking as if his occupation was gone. This lasted for a couple of days, and was so distressing to his parents, that they could not help naming it to those of their friends and acquaintance whom they chanced to see, and so, little by little, it became noised abroad that Silly Billy had been knocked down by a ghost in the ruins of Lympne Castle.

Various opinions were thereupon formed by the different neighbours. Some deemed that the lad had been the subject of a practical joke on the part of people who ought to have known better than to have frightened a poor 'natural' in such a manner; others thought that the boy must have run his stupid head against the walls in the dark, and a few went so far as to declare that 'Silly Billy' had invented the whole story in one of his fanciful dreams. Foremost in this opinion was a man of the name of Bachelor, who lived in a curious cottage built into the side of the hill, not far from Lympne Castle, on the Hythe side. He was generally a quiet and reserved man, paying few visits to his neighbours, getting his living no one knew exactly how, but appearing to be pretty well off, and keeping a horse and cart with which he might often be met driving about the Marsh and its neighbourhood.

His cottage was somewhat untidy inside, nets and hooks and fishing-tackle of all sorts being cast about here and there upon the floor and against the walls of the principal rooms, and old guns, a cutlass or two, and other queer implements occupying the corners thereof. No one knew much about Jack Bachelor, and he did not seem to care that they should, but at the

same time he interfered with nobody, and the quiet folks of Lympne had no inclination or indeed occasion to interfere with him. The Dawsons, therefore, were somewhat surprised at the appearance of this worthy at their farm only a few days after Billy's adventure. Being civil, well-disposed, neighbourly people, they made him welcome, and entered into a friendly conversation upon all the topics of the day. Foremost among these came, as was but natural, the recent occurrence in their own family, and the effect which the shock had produced upon their son.

Mr. Bachelor gave it then and there as his opinion that the whole affair had sprung from Billy's own imagination, or that he had seen an old cow or other inoffensive animal in the dark, and had made up this story out of his own bewildered brain. The Dawsons, however, differed from this conclusion, and, after relating to their visitor every particular which had been communicated to them by their boy, declared that they were certain that something, ghostly or mortal they knew not, had interrupted him on the night in question. Whilst they were talking, Billy himself came in, and, sitting down opposite Bachelor, fixed his eyes upon the latter with the stare which he usually put on when a stranger was present. The man rallied him upon his story, and told him to cheer up and not think of such nonsense. This, however, somewhat irritated the poor boy, who could not bear that his word should be doubted, and in his simple manner he again protested that his tale was true, but without convincing the visitor, who shortly afterwards took his departure. Others of the neighbours often dropped

in about this time, and Billy began to find himself the chief topic of conversation among the gossips of that quiet locality.

Now, although his terror at the adventure of which I have told you was no doubt considerable, yet it is not by one such fright that habits are changed, ideas rooted out, and the whole course of a life turned aside and altered. And so it came to pass, that although Billy's alarm kept him at home for a day or two, and prevented his resorting as hitherto to the old castle ruins, yet its effects gradually wore off. First, he began to roam about on the hill, then he betook himself as of old to Lympne Park and his old woodland haunts, and at last he actually became so bold as to venture once more to creep up towards his favourite castle. At first he did this only by day, but as time went on, habit and association overcame fear, and he strayed up again in the twilight hours to the place which had so long been his almost daily resort. Once or twice, I think, he went as far as the edge of the hill near the walls without daring to go further, but then he became bolder, and at last actually entered again into the old courts, and wandered amid the ruined pillars and buttresses of the ancient building.

By degrees he forgot his terror, and, before many days were over, resumed his old habits and wanderings, though never again with the same entire confidence that he had previously felt. His parents were naturally rejoiced when they saw that their son had regained something of his former cheerfulness, and congratulated each other upon the fact. Their rejoicing, however, was not destined to be of long dura-



tion. About a week or ten days after the change in the youth had become apparent, he went out as usual towards evening, and took his way towards the old ruins. He had not returned when his parents retired for the night, but as this was no unusual occurrence before the adventure which we have related, they thought little of it, and went quietly to rest as usual.

But when morning dawned, and they discovered that Billy had not slept in his bed or anywhere else about the premises, the worthy old couple became alarmed. They looked in barns and outhouses, behind stacks and underneath waggon, but no Billy was to be found. They called him loudly and often, but there was no reply. Then, they sent the farm-servants hither and thither, and enquired of the neighbours far and near, but no one had heard or seen anything of the lad since he had strolled out upon the evening before. High and low his parents sought for him, but without the smallest success in the world. Billy had as completely disappeared as if he had been actually eaten by the ghost who had threatened him, and some of the neighbours were inclined to believe that this had really happened. Others thought that the boy had run away of his own accord, and various opinions were entertained by those who cared to speculate upon the subject.

Speculation, however, was not likely to bring the lost one back, and his father, when a couple of days had elapsed, determined to take still more active measures, and to put the matter into other hands. He accordingly rode down into Hythe, and laid the case before a gentleman who was supposed to be one

of the most vigilant guardians of the peace in that part of the world, and who might possibly be able to frustrate even the designs of a ghost, when they were carried out in such a manner as to involve the making off with mortals who were living under the protection of British law.

Mr. Matson was an officer of police, or at least we should call him so nowadays, though what was his precise office at the time of which I am speaking is more than I can exactly state. Certain it is, at all events, that he was the terror of all the thieves, smugglers, and other bad characters from one end of the south coast of Kent to the other, and that his zeal and perseverance were only equalled by his acuteness in the detection of crime, and apprehension of offenders against the law.

Acting, therefore, upon the advice of some of his friends who could not bring themselves to believe that poor Billy had been carried off by ghosts, or who felt sure that, even if such were the case, Mr. Matson would be able to deal with criminals of the other world as effectually as with those in our own, old Dawson went to consult him, when other and ordinary means seemed to have failed. The good officer heard his tale with attention, and asked him many questions as to Billy's disposition and habits, which were duly and truthfully answered. Then he enquired particularly as to the lad's usual companions, and was informed of his liking for solitary moonlight rambles, together with all such other particulars as the father could tell. Many questions did Mr. Matson ask, and at last dismissed the old man with a promise that the matter

should receive his best attention. With this assurance the poor father was obliged to be satisfied for the present, and rode back to his wife, having done all that could be done, and feeling sad and heavy at heart as he considered how little that 'all' had been.

So passed on day after day, bringing no news of poor Billy, and no comfort to the hearts of the bereaved parents. It may be thought that the loss of a son who could contribute, owing to his infirmity, nothing towards his own maintenance, but must always be a burden to his family, would not, after all, be so great an affliction as if he had been one upon whom Providence had bestowed the usual reasoning faculties of man. This, however, would be a great mistake. A half-witted child is often the mother's favourite when the others are numerous, but an only child, afflicted as was poor Billy, was sure to be doubly and trebly dear to both his parents. Nor, indeed, had his weakness of intellect ever led him into mischievous or bad habits, but although the work which he did upon the farm was casual and of no very great amount, still, his cheerful and amiable disposition had always cheered others, and the presence of the 'innocent' had come to be regarded as something which brought a blessing upon those with whom he was connected.

His loss, therefore, was deeply felt, and his parents were overwhelmed with grief when it occurred. They could not help fancying that they had not taken sufficient care of their boy, and that the evil might have been avoided if they had left him less to himself. So it is, that when anything goes wrong in

this world, we are always very wise afterwards, and have plenty of 'ifs' to bring in, which sound very sensible, but which are perfectly useless. 'If' Billy had been born with all his senses about him, doubtless he would not have acquired the habit of straying about at all hours in the manner which I have described, and in that case he would in all probability never have been lost. But as this 'if' would have effectually prevented my having the present story to tell, I hope that those who are kind enough to read it will not cherish a feeling of unmixed regret that it was otherwise. Still, however this may be, the old couple blamed themselves for their neglect, and made themselves as unhappy as they could over their misfortune.

And now it is high time to come back to our hero himself, and follow his course from that fatal moment when he quitted the farm-dwelling and strolled off in the direction of the ruins. He entered them, as I have already said, though not without a certain degree of timidity, and peered carefully around him as with light footsteps he picked his way between the blocks of stone and ancient brickwork which occupied a portion of the courts within the outer walls. Presently he sat down upon one, and listened attentively, hoping that the sounds of spirit music might again fall upon his ears, and that his eyes might once more be greeted with the sight of the dancers who had afforded him so much amusement upon his former visit. No such sounds or sights, however, was he destined to see, and he sat there for some few minutes in the midst of perfect silence.

The fragment upon which Billy had seated himself was in the inner court, and towards the north-western corner, and from his position he could see more clearly over the whole court than he had been able to do from the partition wall upon which he had climbed and sat on the previous occasion. After a while, since nothing was to be seen or heard, the boy began to get tired of waiting, and twice rose to depart. Had he carried out his intention, we should probably have had no more to tell about him and his adventures, but, luckily or unluckily, he changed his mind. The moon came out so strong and clear, and the old ruins looked so grand and picturesque in her light that Billy was somehow or other more than ever attracted to the place, and resuming his seat upon the block of stone, began to dream away as usual of spirits and fairies, and all kinds of wonderful things and beings whose existence and doings had for him, as we know, a great and extraordinary charm.

As he thus sat and dreamed at that lonely hour, suddenly there fell upon his ear the same low rumbling sound as that which had upon his previous visit preceded the coming of the terrible creature which had pursued and seized him. Billy listened, and the noise not only continued but increased. A cold shivering came over him, his limbs trembled, his heart seemed to stand still, his blood to freeze, and his eyes almost started out of his head as he peered forward with nervous anxiety, straining his sight in order to see whether anything would appear in that south-east corner of the court from whence, as before, the sound evidently proceeded. For a minute or two,

Billy waited thus, in frightened anticipation of what might follow.

Then, after a little while, the noise ceased, but only to recommence a few moments afterwards, and greatly to increase. It was a heavy, rolling, rumbling sound, and plainly came nearer and nearer to the listener. Still he listened, waited and watched, being in truth so paralysed with fear, as to be unable to run away, as he might otherwise have done. At last, all of a sudden, there appeared as if springing out of the ground the head of a man, or a ghost as Billy imagined, bearing a strange and awful appearance. The ghost of a wide-awake was upon its head, and the ghost of a jacket upon the shoulders which emerged from the earth immediately after it.

Billy sat open-mouthed as the vision arose, and trembled still more violently when the body and legs of the ghost followed, encased in the ghost of clothing such as he had probably worn when formerly upon the earth. This was evidently not the same creature who had appeared to Billy before, inasmuch as his dress was different, and his height scarcely so great. He spoke the same language, however, for as soon as he had shown his whole body fairly upon the surface of the ground, he looked first at one side then upon the other, and then speaking as it were into the ground, probably to some ghostly companions behind him, uttered the strange, yet partly intelligible words. 'All right, mates—coast clear—shove her up.'

Up to this moment it was pretty plain that the ghost had not observed Billy, who was sitting under the shadow of the wall in the other corner, whence

he could see more easily than he could be seen. As soon as the ghost had spoken, the rumbling noise was resumed, and the same sort of thing which Billy had before seen was pushed up from below, the first ghost assisting with a rope, whilst other ghosts were evidently engaged in forwarding its passage from behind.

Presently the large object was pushed quite up into the court, and immediately after it, came one, two, three, four other creatures, among whom was one so like to that which had pursued and caught Billy on the other night, that Billy trembled more than ever. Before long, he had cause enough to do so, for the events that followed were calculated to have alarmed any person in his position, even though he had happened to have been possessed of rather more than less of the ordinary wit of mortal men. The five creatures who had thus come up, as it were, from the bowels of the earth, hauled, pushed, dragged, and rolled forward the object which they had brought with them, and which, to Billy's terrified eyes, appeared to be nothing more nor less than the ghost of an enormous barrel. This they had some difficulty in bringing up to the surface of the earth, but as soon as they had done so, they began, apparently with more ease, to roll it directly towards the spot where the lad was seated.

Poor Billy was now beside himself with fright. If the party should approach nearer (which, in fact, they were doing every moment), they could not fail to see him, and if once they saw him, he had little doubt that the fate with which he had been threatened

would at once befall him, and that he should be then and there eaten up alive by the ghost in the gaberdine. Too frightened to fly, he sat shivering and shaking on his seat, until the awful creatures were close upon him. After the survey which the first had given before he had pronounced the coast to be clear, they had all been so intent upon their task as not to have looked very particularly at anything else. Now, however, the moon shone out, as it seemed to Billy, brighter than ever, and the ghosts, or whatever they were, all at once, perceived the boy close to them.

Almost in one and the same breath, they uttered an exclamation of mingled surprise and vexation, and then, one of them followed it up by springing forward as if to seize the luckless intruder. It was the one in the gaberdine, the same who had chased poor Billy on the previous occasion; and the boy's anguish and terror may well be imagined. The ghost, however, neither roared, nor shook his gaberdine as before. Indeed, he appeared to think the matter of too much importance for any such demonstrations and he laid his claw firmly upon the shoulder of the boy, as he exclaimed, in a low but clear tone of voice, addressing his companions, 'Tis the natural again.'

As he spoke, a flash of intelligence lighted up Billy's mind, in spite both of his imperfect wits and the terror under which he was labouring. The dress was no uncommon dress, and was similar to that worn by many persons of his acquaintance, but the figure appeared to be not entirely strange to him, and as the face of the ghost came near to his own, and the tones of its voice sounded in his ears, he was



certain that he heard and saw, not a spirit from the other world, but none other than his father's neighbour and recent visitor, Jack Bachelor.

The instant that the poor lad recognised, or thought he recognised this man, a load of terror seemed to fall from him, his heart grew lighter, and he found his tongue and courage sufficiently to exclaim aloud, 'Ah, ha! you not frighten Billy now—Billy know you, Mr. Bachelor!'

Better for poor Billy if he had not opened his mouth, for the effect of his words was very startling. The person whom he addressed turned to his companions with an expression too strong for polite literature and remarked, 'If this chap goes off home, we're blown and done for.'

A sullen murmur of assent was the only reply for an instant, and then one of the others observed 'Tis five lives against one—*he* must be done for, and there 'll be an end of it.'

Again came a hoarse murmur of agreement with this cruel suggestion, and poor Billy's life was never in greater danger. Hardly conscious of this, and at the same time not quite comfortable under the stern and angry glances cast upon him, the boy began to get off his seat, muttering meanwhile, half to himself half to the others, 'Billy cold, Billy go home.'

'No, you don't,' remarked one of the party in a gruff voice, and a hand was again laid upon the boy's shoulder. At this Billy began to whimper, finding himself restrained from moving, and in another instant the whimper would have become a louder expression of grief and despair than might have suited

the audience around him. A handkerchief was, therefore, suddenly and roughly thrust into his mouth, and after a moment's consultation and whispering together, Bachelor seized upon the boy, and, aided by another man, dragged him, in spite of his frantic struggles, towards the further corner of the inner court in which they were standing.

Meanwhile, the words that Billy heard them say as they forced him forward, were little calculated to soothe or allay his fears. ' 'Tis the only way ; ' ' the risk must not be run ; ' ' dead men tell no tales ; ' ' the old well will keep the secret,' and similar remarks he heard ; but he had no time to hear much, for almost immediately he found himself struggling with his captors upon the very brink of the old well to which I have already made allusion. The nettles stung his ancles, the bricks and rough stones bruised him as he was dragged over them, and mighty efforts did he make to shake himself free.

All, however, was in vain ! closer and closer to the mouth of the well they drew him, and when the handkerchief which had been placed in his mouth was roughly drawn therefrom, he had only time to give vent to one low cry of utter misery and despair, before he was thrust over the edge, and precipitated into the deep abyss from which no chance of escape could be expected.

Those of my readers who have read this truthful story with the care and attention which it deserves, will probably before this time have tolerably well understood the occurrences both of the first and second evenings which poor Billy had passed within

the ruins of Lymgne Castle. It is not for me to say whether the dancers whom the boy had seen, existed only in his own imagination, or whether they were really beings from another world, or fairy sprites permitted to play their revels upon certain spots in this earth which we inhabit. But whatever they were, and wherever they came from, they had nothing to do with the creatures whose arrival had proved so disastrous to our hero. These, in fact, were nothing more nor less than a gang of smugglers, the chief and ringleader of whom was no other than Jack Bachelor.

There was a subterranean passage leading from the edge of Romney Marsh to Lymgne Castle, amid the ruins of which they had been long accustomed to hide their booty until fit opportunity offered for its disposal. The rumbling which poor Billy had heard upon two occasions was caused by these men in bringing their heavy bales and casks up the stone paved passage into the castle court, which they entered by means of a cleverly-concealed trap-door. No doubt his discovery of their being but men was a great misfortune for the poor lad. Upon their first finding him within their haunts, they had imagined that a good fright would drive him from the place, and prevent his again intruding upon their occupation. But when for the second time he appeared amongst them, and recognised Bachelor, their danger of discovery was undoubtedly much increased, and the certainty that Billy would disclose their secret, and thus lead to their detection and punishment, had tempted them to secure themselves by an act from which most

of them, at other times and under different circumstances, would have recoiled with horror.

At the moment, however, when their eyes lighted upon the unfortunate youth, the same conviction seized them all, that their only chance of safety lay in his death then and there, and thus they were suddenly betrayed into the commission of a great crime, and poor Billy's life seemed likely to be sacrificed without any fault of his own. The occurrences which follow, and which will appear to some to be the very strangest part of this veracious history, are such, you will observe, as could never have been known save through the chief actor in the same, and I, therefore, must not be blamed if I seem to be relating, on *my* part, anything which sounds curious or unlikely to have happened.

Crash, bang, smash, went Billy through the brambles, nettles, and grass which overhung the mouth of the old well, and grew out of its sides in great profusion. Those who had thrown him down, leaned over and peered into the well, as they heard his body descending, although after the first few feet they could see nothing in the impenetrable darkness below. It would have been a strange sight for an artist to have painted : that old well's mouth, three or four men earnestly looking over its side, whilst the moon shone down, and showed in its pale, calm light their faces, now that the moment of excitement had passed away, already beginning to express horror and remorse at the cruel deed which they had committed. At a little distance from them lay the cask for the sake of which they had been so ready to take a fellow-

creature's life, and cold and grey in the moonlight stood out the old ruins around them, silent but solemn witness of their crime.

As they stood, anxiously looking, they heard, far below, a deep, dull, heavy splash in the water of the well. Each started suddenly back and looked at his fellows. 'Poor chap, he's done for now, anyhow,' remarked one.

'Yes,' said another, 'no man could escape from this place. I wish it hadn't been necessary.'

'Shut up, Bill!' cried Bachelor, at these words, 'The lout would have blabbed, sure enough, and there wasn't only one way for to stop it. No blabbing down *there*' (and he pointed significantly to the well as he spoke), 'and there warn't no help for it. Don't turn baby-hearted now, the job's done and can't be undone, so let's to business.'

His companions, fully realising the truth that there was no undoing the crime which they had just perpetrated, had no word to say in opposition to their leader, and all felt anxious for some employment which would prevent them from thinking more about it at that moment. They therefore followed Bachelor's orders, and began forthwith to busy themselves about the cask and its contents, and thus must we leave them engaged whilst we follow poor innocent Billy in the terrible descent down the old well's mouth.

And, first of all, let me inform my readers that the splash in the water which the listening smugglers had overheard was not, as they had imagined, caused by the falling body of their victim. In his descent Billy had stretched out his arms right and left for

something with which to stay himself, and catching hold of a loose piece of brickwork in the side of the well, had dragged it from its place, and it had fallen, lumbering down, into the water far below. This was the sound heard by the listeners above, but Billy was meanwhile in a very different position. When the loose brickwork slipped from his grasp, of course he fell further down the well, but he had fallen no very great distance when, somehow or other, he found himself clinging to a huge stone in the side wall which showed no inclination to follow the example of the brickwork, but which, jutting somewhat forward into the middle space between the two sides of the well formed a kind of support for his body, of which he almost unconsciously availed himself. He rested upon it for one instant, and then perceived that immediately upon one side of this stone there was an enormous opening in the wall, a great gap, in fact, which seemed to lead into the very heart of the earth.

Billy had scarcely time to make this discovery, when, from the mouth of the gap, a hand was extended towards him, and a voice at the same time exclaimed, 'This way, my young friend, this way, one "thank-you" for admission, and ladies and children half price.'

These words would probably have struck Billy as very extraordinary if he had either been in the full possession of his senses, or in a less dangerous and critical position than at that particular moment. As it was, however, they made no impression whatever upon him, his whole anxiety, and that one of a not unnatural character, being to get into the gap or anywhere else where he might be saved from falling any

further down the well. He seized the friendly hand, therefore, and without more ado crept into the gap as well and as quickly as he could manage to do so. Then, for the first time, he looked at his preserver and new friend, and saw that it was a little old gentleman with a very long striped jersey on, which reached quite down below his knees, below which were a pair of black leather gaiters with shiny buttons, which presented rather a curious contrast to the bright yellow stripes of the jersey. Upon his feet were a pair of evening shoes with silver buckles in them, and upon his head a white cotton nightcap, which had evidently not been put on that day for the first time.

Billy observed these particulars of his friend's dress with sufficient care to be able to relate them in full detail afterwards, but, at the moment, he was so filled with surprise at finding himself where he was, that it is wonderful how he managed to observe or recollect anything at all.

'Come on, come with me,' said the old gentleman, and, as he spoke, he advanced boldly, as it seemed to Billy, into the very bowels of the earth. They proceeded along a passage, quite wide enough to let them pass, though they were obliged to go one at a time, and in the distance before them Billy fancied he saw a light somewhat more bright than the dim kind of twilight by which the passage itself was somehow or other lighted. The distance was not very long, after all, for almost before he knew where he was Billy found himself in a large room or cave, cut out of the rock in the side of the hill, and furnished after a fashion which at once showed, in a manner not to be mis-

taken, that it served as the residence of persons of distinction. There were chairs and sofas with gorgeous coverings of red and gold, beautiful pictures hung upon the walls, a large glass bowl full of gold and silver fishes swimming about in clear water stood upon a round table in the middle of the room, and upon one side was to be seen a grand pianoforte upon which lay scattered about a quantity of music which had evidently been lately in use. But that which most astonished Billy when he first entered the room was the appearance of its occupants, who were none other than the velvet-clad gentleman and gorgeously-apparelled lady whom he had seen dancing in the outer court upon his former visit to the old castle.

Yes! there they undoubtedly were, as large as life, and as the youth and his companion entered the room, both rose from a sofa upon which they had been sitting, and advanced to meet them. 'Whom have we here, Doctor Fungus?' asked the gentleman.

'Sir,' replied the little old man who had brought Billy into the room, 'this is our moonlight friend who spied at the dancing the other night. Cast by nefarious hands into the great tunnel which goes through to the other side of the world, he has bruised, battered, crushed, maimed, torn, lacerated and otherwise placed in a state of discomfort and disarrangement, his head, arms, legs, feet, shoulders, body and general system, in consequence of which he requires immediate nursing and attention.'

As he spoke, Billy began to feel that the little old man's words were perfectly true, and he only wondered, that he had not before discovered how much he had.



been bruised and shaken by his fall. He had not been able to avoid striking against the rough sides of the well during his descent, and his arms, legs and shoulders ached uncommonly, whilst his head followed their example after a violent fashion, and he felt as if his body had been shaken up together like one of those draughts in glass bottles which have to undergo that process before they are taken by the happy patient for whom they have been prescribed.

And not only did Billy become conscious of his condition during the speech of the little old gentleman, but so grave was that condition that, just as the speech was concluded, his powers of hearing and seeing were concluded at the same time, and he fell down in a dead faint upon the floor. When he recovered the use of his senses, Billy found himself lying upon a sofa, far more deliciously comfortable than the old wooden-backed article stuffed with horsehair, which passed for a sofa in his father's best parlour. This was a real sofa, and no mistake, and so soft and pleasant to recline upon, that Billy fancied that he was in bed when he first woke up, and it took him several seconds to make out where he really was, and what had happened to him.

As soon as he was sufficiently recovered to look about him, he perceived the three individuals who had previously been in the room all standing in a row by the side of the sofa on which he lay, intently regarding him, and all the while holding their respective fore-fingers up to the side of their several noses, which gave them rather a singular appearance. As soon as Billy opened his eyes, the little old man exclaimed in an eager voice, 'He's come to!' and the velvet-clad

gentleman uttered the same words in almost the same breath.

'Nonsense!' cried the lady in a clear but rather shrill voice, 'He's come *one*! I should say. How can one person come *two*?'

At this rebuff the two men looked at each other and winked knowingly, as much as to say, 'Oh! *she's* a 'cute one, there's none so clever as she,' and attempted no answer to her remark. Having thus, at once, asserted and established the natural supremacy which woman enjoys over the coarser sex, the lady advanced closer to the sofa, and addressed Billy in the following words 'Tumble-down Tomboy, how are your brains and bones?'

Billy looked up and opened his eyes to their fullest extent, but, not in the least knowing what to say, wisely said nothing.

Then the little old man advanced meekly towards the lady and said, 'Madam, don't you think a lotion —',

'No, I don't!' she sharply replied, 'How can I *think* a lotion—you *make* a lotion, you don't think it, I fear you're a fool, Fungus.'

'As you please, madam,' returned the latter with a humble bow.

'But I *don't* please, and it isn't the least as I please,' cried the lady. 'How can it please anybody that a man should be a fool, though most of them are so, I must allow. Come, cure this Tumble-down Tomboy out of hand!'

'That will take time, madam,' gravely answered the other.

'*Take* time?' she cried angrily, 'why can't you talk English? You can't *take* time, as if it was a draught or a pill, time goes on steadily and regularly its own way, and no one can touch or take it if they tried. You should say "some time must elapse before the cure can be effected," or some sentence of that description.'

Dr. Fungus again bowed respectfully at these words, and attempted no further reply, in which, considering how he had already been snubbed, it will probably be thought that he exercised a wise discretion. The velvet-clad gentleman, however, now stepped forward and spoke, addressing himself to the gorgeously-apparelled lady in a courtly manner and with a polite bow. 'Fair one,' he exclaimed, 'shall we leave the patient to the worthy Doctor?'

'Foul one,' replied she, 'not a bit of it—he'll dose him within an inch of his life, and, when his case is hopeless, send him to a homœopathic doctor to die, and ever after swear that he was killed by homœopathy. I know their tricks! Send for the cure-all ointment at once!'

At these words the gentleman turned to the table and rang a little silver bell which stood upon it, at the sound of which two pages instantly appeared, though where they came from Billy could not see. They were clad in dark blue livery, perfectly covered with silver buttons, and differed in no respect from ordinary pages, except in their promptitude in answering the bell. To these the gentleman gave the order to fetch the ointment to which the lady had referred, and after the lapse of a few seconds they re-appeared, bearing

between them an ivory box of considerable size, which they placed upon the floor near Billy's sofa, and immediately afterwards withdrew, first, however, depositing upon the ground in front of the ivory box a silver bason of great beauty.

As soon as the pages had gone, the lady made a sign to the gentleman and the doctor, who thereupon fetched from another part of the room a small circular table. The lady then proceeded to touch a spring in the side of the ivory box, upon which followed the most curious result that Billy had ever seen. Four small silver pipes instantly showed themselves, issuing from the front of the box above the bason, into which they commenced to discharge four different kinds of liquid, if such their contents might be called. From one flowed honey, from another butter, the third yielded treacle, and from the fourth there proceeded a stream of marmalade of delicious appearance. As these several fluids trickled into the bason, the lady stood over, anxiously regarding the process, until the bason was somewhat more than half full. Then she touched another spring in the ivory box, and directly the streams stopped, the silver pipes disappeared, and the performance came to an end.

At another sign from the lady, Dr. Fungus now took the silver bason, and carefully placed it upon the circular table. Having done this, he took from a drawer a large silver spoon and fork, and with these implements began assiduously to mix up the ingredients which were contained in the bason. He continued this employment for several minutes, and then

turning round to the lady, said, with an obsequious bow, 'Madam, the ointment is finished.'

'How stupid you are!' she immediately exclaimed. 'If it was finished, it would be come to an end, and could be of no use to us. What you mean, I suppose, is that *you* have finished making it, but why can't you say so in plain English? However, now let us set to work.'

So saying, she approached the sofa, and bending over Billy, pronounced words which he could never clearly recollect or pronounce, but which sounded something like the following, 'Anamastiphalticalicum-inophibinitondapomibonenos,' or, at least, as Billy afterwards said, it might as well have been that as anything else. As she spoke, she deliberately dipped her forefinger into the basin which contained the ointment, and then placed it calmly but firmly on the tip of Billy's nose, which had the immediate and magical effect of sending him fast asleep, and causing him to see in his sleep the most extraordinary things that ever were seen in this world, or out of it either, as far as I am able to tell you. Many thousand little green frogs hopped first before his eyes, and upon his body and over his face, and, what was still stranger, every single individual frog had a little paper cigarette in his mouth, to puff which he continually stopped before taking a fresh jump. Every time each frog touched Billy, a gentle stroke of electricity seemed to be given him, and if ever by chance any ashes from the cigarettes fell upon him, he felt the same shock with greater force.

Immediately after the frogs came legions of mice,

each of which had on boots with sharp heels and pointed toes, with which they kicked the boy soundly as they ran over him, making his legs and body tingle all over. Hardly had they performed their task when a quantity of little crabs succeeded, and each of these had a small pair of silver pincers with which they nipped their victim repeatedly, as if they were determined not to leave an inch or a morsel of his body unnipped. These again were followed by a myriad of small birds, apparently wrens, only much more vicious than wrens, for they immediately began to peck Billy with such good will that he began to fear that he should really be pecked to pieces in no time. But after a while the birds ceased to annoy him, and after their departure he felt all over his body, arms and legs only a tingling sensation that was rather warm and comfortable than otherwise. The birds, all the same, had not departed far, nor had any of the other creatures, for as soon as the operations had been concluded, the whole company of operators began to dance and sing after the most marvellous fashion.

The birds chirped and whistled as excitedly as if they were doing it for a wager, the mice squeaked vehemently, the frogs croaked themselves hoarse in the attempt to emulate the noise which the others were making, and the crabs, finding themselves behind-hand in the discordant outcry, cracked their own shells with vexation, and added all they could to the general hubbub. Louder and louder grew the sound, and more and more excited the dancing, until, suddenly, Billy perceived that Dr. Fungus had been

drawn into the company. There he was, with his cotton night-cap off, which he brandished wildly in his hand as he madly capered about, chuckling fearfully between pleasurable excitement and direful want of breath.

Nor was he long the only mortal there, for in another moment Billy perceived the velvet-clad gentleman joining in the strange performance, and, wonderful to relate, the gorgeously-apparelled lady ere long followed his example. Violently, yet gracefully, they danced, springing hither and thither with wondrous activity, and, strange to say, never stamping on a single one of the little animals about them. Frogs, mice, crabs and birds were all about, over and under them, as far as Billy could see, but somehow or other they avoided being hurt with a marvellous agility, and, though madder and madder grew the dance, nothing but the crabshells appeared to be the least bit injured.

The revel was at its height, the creatures were all exerting themselves to their utmost, and Billy was wondering what in the world they would do next, when an arm was gently placed behind him, he was lifted up to a sitting posture, opened his eyes and awoke to perfect consciousness. Where was he? What had happened? Who had touched him? These are questions which my readers can no more answer than could poor Billy. For one moment I alone am in possession of the secret. But I don't like secrets, and must therefore take my friends and readers into confidence at once.

Billy was lying at the foot of the old ruins of

Lympne castle, amid fragments of rock and brick-work, overgrown with grass and nettles, where he would have seemed to ordinary people to have been enjoying a sound slumber. That is *where* he was. As to what had happened, you know as much and no more than I do, and I am afraid we never *shall* know any more. That is to say (for my story has not nearly come to an end yet), we never shall know how much really did happen, and how much Billy had imagined or dreamed, of what I have told you. Anyhow, there he was, and there he was discovered by the person who had raised him up into a sitting posture. This person was an entire stranger to the boy, he drove a small cart, which he had left in the road hard by, and I cannot say what had induced him to get out and come up to that side of the ruins, unless it was that he wished to make a closer inspection of a very curious old building. He came there, at all events, and was very much astonished to find a young man or boy lying, apparently either in a swoon, or in an uncommonly deep sleep, at the foot of the ruins. He wondered very much how he could have come there, and I confess that, up to this very moment, I share his astonishment.

Had Billy dreamed the whole story of the smugglers and of their behaviour to him? I think not, for reasons which you will hereafter see. Had the gap in the well wall been partly a dream, in so far as the room and its occupants were concerned, and had it really been only an actual gap through which the lad had made his escape, and crept or fallen down to the spot where the traveller found him? Or had the



powers of magic been at work, cured him of his bruises and placed him in safety at that place? Perhaps there is some truth in all these suppositions, and yet, perhaps, none of them is entirely right. Never mind, we have only to do with the results.

The stranger was a venerable, grey-bearded, dark-eyed man, and he accosted Billy with much kindness. And now comes by far the most wonderful and extraordinary part of my story. Billy felt quite a different creature from that which he had ever felt before. A film or mist seemed to have been taken off his brain by some of the strange things which had befallen him, and he experienced within himself some great change which he could not describe in words, but which made him conscious that the shock which he had undergone (or perhaps the ointment with which the gorgeously-apparelled lady had touched the tip of his nose) had somehow restored the equilibrium of his mind, and shaken his wits together in such a manner as to marvellously improve and strengthen his intellectual condition. When the old stranger raised him up and asked him the reason of his being in that place and in such a state, the lad still felt odd and confused, but answered reasonably, and, with the remembrance of the smugglers fresh upon him, begged the other to protect him from those who had tried to destroy him, and to take him away altogether.

It so happened that the stranger was a man of eccentric character, whose great delight was to drive about the country unattended, and make himself acquainted with the scenery of the different parts of the south of England. He was eccentric in other things

also, and finding the boy frightened, and evidently anxious to escape from some person or persons, resolved to humour him. He therefore helped him to rise, gave him a refreshing drink from a flask which he carried at his belt, and helped him down to the cart which he had left. It was then very early in the morning, and hardly a soul was about, which accounts for no one having seen or thought of the stranger or this manner of Billy's disappearance. The cart was a small one, and of a peculiar build, having a covering which could be used or not at the pleasure of its owner. This the old man at once put up, and placing Billy at the back of the vehicle, well concealed in straw, with a good warm rug over him, proceeded on his way. One of his habits was to avoid as much as possible the main roads, thinking (and perhaps rightly) that he saw more of the country by driving along the lanes and less frequented roads. This, though it delayed his progress from one point to another, rendered it less likely that he should be met or observed, and so it was that he did not encounter anyone for some considerable time after he had taken up his unexpected passenger.

He drove along from Lympe through Court-upstreet, and all along Aldington until he came to the road which turns down to Bonnington, which he followed, and so away through Ruckinge and Warehorne to Ham-street, where he stopped to bait at the 'Duke's Head,' but where Billy still remained snugly ensconced in the back part of the cart. We need not follow the old stranger's journey any further, although he drove leisurely through a part of the country

which was at that time rarely visited by any save its own inhabitants. He dived into the quaint little village of Kennardington, visited Tenterden, and worked his way through all kinds of out of the way places in the far-famed Weald of Kent before he came, as he did at last, to more habitable regions, and eventually found himself in London.

Billy accompanied him all the while, and the judicious treatment of the old man proved highly beneficial to him in every respect. He was respectably re-clothed, and made to present an appearance very different from that of the former 'Silly Billy' of Lympne Castle farm. Moreover, by quiet, sensible conversation, his mental powers were strengthened and developed, and the change which had come over the boy was made the most of, and improved as far as could possibly be the case. The transformation was curious ; but it was complete, and the kind stranger, having taken up the cure of Billy as a hobby, took such pains and managed so well, that in a month's time from the day on which the lad had fallen into his hands, it was no longer a half-witted creature with whom he had to deal, but a being of average common sense and intelligence, daily improving, and giving every promise of becoming permanently quite as sensible as any of the human beings among whom his lot might be cast.

Meanwhile, although Billy was fairly, nay, very happy with his new friend, he had not entirely forgotten his parents, for whom he had always cherished a deep and natural affection. The old stranger (whom we may call Mr. Drewe) quite recognised the pro-

priety of the feeling, and also of the desire which Billy entertained to revisit those whom he loved so well. Strange to say, during all this month neither the one nor the other ever thought of the anguish and despair which the old couple were probably enduring at the loss of their only child. Mr. Drewe was wrapped up in his one great object—the perfect cure of the youth whom he had so curiously found left on his hands, and Billy himself was too profoundly grateful to his benefactor to wish to hurry his departure, or indeed to think of leaving him until he should first mention the subject.

At the end of a month, however, when the youth's state of bodily and mental health had so materially improved, he had some conversation with his kind friend, which opened his heart to the latter, and led them to plan together a return to the old home and neighbourhood from whence Billy had been brought. The worthy old gentleman proposed to drive him down in the very same vehicle in which he had carried him away, and, accordingly, one fine morning they set off together.

Still adhering to the old plan, Mr. Drewe avoided the main road from London to Folkestone, which would have led him within a mile and a half of Lympne Castle, and, as usual, took his journey after a round-about fashion. They got to Sevenoaks, and then they drove between Maidstone and Rochester, and crossed through the parishes between Faversham and Eastwell Park, turning up behind Wye, through Crundale and Hastingleigh, down upon Brabourne, which they skirted, and so passed through Stowting

away to Standford, and down by Westenhangar to Lympne.

They arrived at New Inn Green towards the evening of an August day, and having bespoken rooms, and seen the faithful horse safely stowed away in the inn stables, Billy said he had a request to make which he hoped his kind friend would grant. He was anxious, he said, to visit the old castle once more by moonlight, before seeing his parents again. To this his companion made no objection, and accordingly they set out together, and walked down the road until they had reached the old ruins. Ere this time Billy had, of course, related to his benefactor all the recollections of his early youth, and made him well acquainted with the occurrences which he believed to have taken place within the ancient castle. It was therefore with no little interest that Mr. Drewe accompanied his youthful companion to the spot whereupon such extraordinary incidents had taken place. As they approached, Billy eagerly pointed out the different features of interest in the locality, and the scenes of his childish dreams and wanderings. They walked round the old castle, and presently came to the very self-same gap in which Billy had sat upon that memorable visit to the ruins which had led to all that you have been hearing about.

Here the two travellers paused for an instant, whilst the youth described his recollections, and then they entered together, crossed the outer court, and stood at the identical spot from whence Billy had looked into that inner court which had so well nigh proved fatal to him. He was just about to narrate

once more all that had there occurred, illustrating his story by pointing out the exact place where each event happened, when he suddenly stopped short, looked at his companion and listened attentively to a sound which fell upon his ear. It was the same low rumbling sound as that which he had twice before heard, and seemed to have come in strange and unexpected corroboration of at least part of his story. For half a minute or so, the two companions strained their sense of hearing to its utmost limit without success; then the noise began again, grew louder and louder as upon previous occasions, and at last there issued from the ground several figures, rolling a huge cask before them, just as they had done when Billy had twice been a witness of their proceedings.

The young man clasped his companion's arm with nervous anxiety, as the men began to drag and push forward their prize in the same direction as that which he had described in his narrative of his own adventures in the place, and was about to speak, when a new feature was suddenly added to the scene. Loud through the moonlight air rang a clear voice, 'Stand in the king's name!' and in another instant some half dozen men rushed from among the ruins and advanced upon the smugglers.

The latter, although taken by surprise, were not disposed to yield up their booty or their liberty without a struggle. Leaving the cask, therefore, they boldly encountered their opponents, and the old ruins soon resounded with the noise of deadly strife. But those who fought on the side of the law were better armed than their adversaries, and had, moreover,

the advantage of having chosen their own moment and ground for the attack. A very short time elapsed before they were completely victorious, one smuggler lay wounded upon the ground, another had somehow escaped from the same side on which they had entered, and two more had been made prisoners.

One, however, had not yet yielded, and this was none other than the famous Jack Bachelor who still maintained a desperate struggle with no less formidable an opponent than Mr. Kirby himself. Seeing, however, that his companions had been disposed of, and that he would be presently surrounded, Bachelor found that his only remaining chance was in flight, and, dodging his adversary adroitly, so as to get a good start, he came rushing in headlong haste towards the very spot upon which the two travellers were standing, eagerly watching the results of the encounter. Being fleet of foot, and moreover urged to unwonted exertions by his tolerably accurate knowledge of the destiny which would befall him if captured, Jack Bachelor gained upon his pursuer, and rushed at the wall several yards in front of the latter. He sprang upon it eagerly, and was just about to jump down into the outer court, when he caught sight of the figure of Billy standing close beside him, in the shadow of the wall, as if he had risen from the ground.

The effect was great and instantaneous. 'Tis the natural!' he shouted, in an unearthly voice of terror, and, instead of pursuing his onward flight, turned sharp round as if struck by a cannon-ball, and jumped back into the very arms of Mr. Kirby and his men, by whom he was speedily secured and bound. Having no object

in concealing themselves, our two travellers now came forward, and great was Jack Bachelor's disgust and self-reproach when he found that, by the first law of retribution, it was Billy himself, in the flesh, alive and well, who had been the immediate cause of his capture. Indeed, this was more entirely so than he himself imagined at the moment. For Mr. Kirby's presence, and detection of the smugglers, had mainly come about through old Dawson's account of the disappearance of his son. Kirby was a sensible man, of sound sense and good heart, and no great believer in the power of ghosts to carry people off bodily. So when he had heard the tale which the bereaved father poured into his ears upon the occasion of his visit to Hythe, he at once made up his mind that Billy had fallen in with mortal rather than spiritual enemies, and determined to watch the old ruins carefully for a time at least.

For two or three weeks nothing occurred, but the close examination which the intelligent officer had instituted satisfied him that the place had been made use of by those smugglers whom it was his business to detect and bring to justice. He had, therefore, bided his time, and having received reliable information of the landing of a cargo of goods in Romney Marsh, had kept watch in the old ruins for several nights, rightly conjecturing that this was one of the hiding-places used by the smugglers in passing their booty to their friends inland.

As will have been seen, success crowned his efforts, and the result of his night's work was the breaking up of one of the most formidable bands of smugglers in the neighbourhood, and the capture of their ring-leader.



Great was Mr. Kirby's delight when he found that, together with this successful raid upon the smugglers, he had lighted upon the discovery of the lost youth, and thus arrived at the solution of a mystery which had puzzled the whole neighbourhood for a month. He insisted upon forthwith accompanying Billy and his friend to the farm hard by, and thus becoming a witness of the restitution to the disconsolate parents of the son whom they believed they had lost for ever.

Accordingly, the whole party marched down together to the farm, where the scene which followed is quite beyond my powers of description. Indeed, there is scarce need to describe or tell anything more in connection with this story. Jack Bachelor received a heavy punishment for his misdeeds, and was never more heard of in that part of the country. Old Dawson and his wife were of course overjoyed to get back their son, and all the more so when they discovered his improved condition of mind. They were immensely grateful to Mr. Drewe for all his kindness, and willingly made an arrangement with him by which Billy was to pay him an annual visit as long as he lived.

And that is really about all I have to tell. Billy grew up to be a sensible, intelligent man, paid his rent and taxes regularly, went twice to church every Sunday, and preferred a glass of ale to either spirits, or water, or both together. In fact, I suppose he had had enough of 'spirits' in his early life, at least so he always said. For Billy Dawson always stuck to the truth of his story, just as I have told it you. You might explain it away as best you could ; you might tell him of the impossibility of many parts of it, and

convince yourself that you had got a full and satisfactory theory upon the whole matter, but, as regarded honest Billy, your efforts would always be utterly fruitless and in vain. He would shake his head with a friendly smile, which conveyed the idea that he quite appreciated your good intentions, but at the same time knew perfectly well that you were out of your depth altogether, and were discussing matters upon which you were profoundly ignorant. *He* knew what he had seen, heard, and felt, and was not going to give up his opinion for you or anybody else.

So, to the end of his days, Billy remained a firm and faithful believer in fairies and such-like creatures, and although his days of musing and dreaming at night amid the ruins were past and gone, he never quite forgot the early hours of his childhood, and a vein of light and cheerful playfulness ever ran through his disposition, which often caused him to be pointed out by those who knew what such a thing betokens, as one upon whom elfin eyes had lighted at his birth with a friendly gaze, and who was happy in being still one of those fortunate and enviable creatures—the favourites of the fairies!

